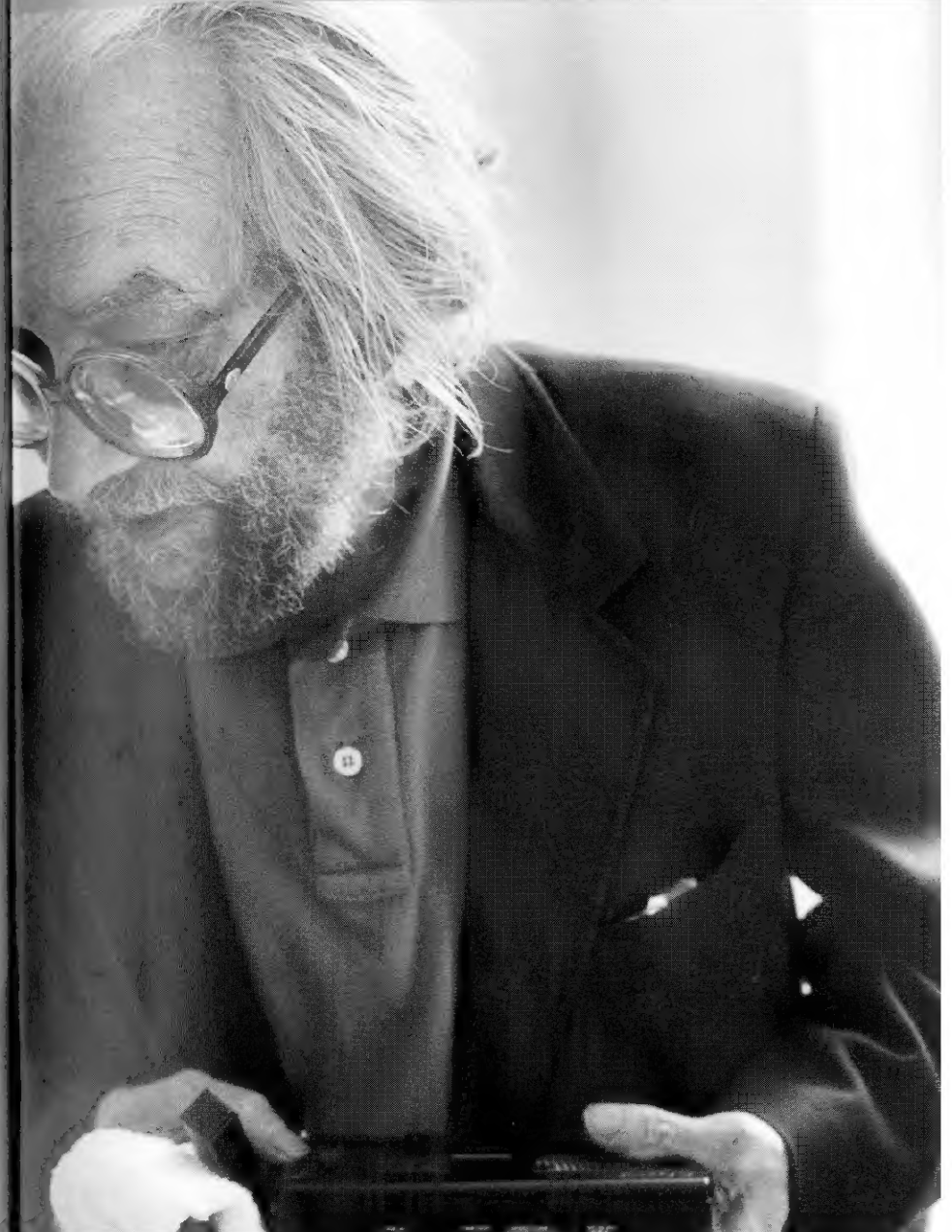


Think of the Self Speaking

Harry Smith—Selected Interviews



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Think of the Self Speaking
Harry Smith—Selected Interviews

Smith

Introduction by Allen Ginsberg
Edited by Rani Singh

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Elbow/Cityful Press
Seattle 1999

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Special thanks: Jim Jones, Randy Roark, Philip Smith, Chuck Pirtle, Harry Smith Archives, Simon Pettet, Allen Ginsberg Trust—all those who graciously allowed us to use their interviews and photos.

Some of these interviews first appeared in the following magazines:

Film Culture, *Sing Out!*, and *Poetry Flash*.

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First Edition 1999
1234567890
Design by Steve Creson

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-publication Data

Smith, Harry Everett, 1923–1991.

Think of the Self Speaking: Harry Smith, Selected Interviews/
introduction, Allen Ginsberg; editor, Rani Singh.—1st ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and filmography.

ISBN 1-885089-06-6 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Smith, Harry Everett, 1923–1991—Interviews. 2. Artists-directors—
United States—Interviews. 3. Motion picture producers and directors—United
States—Interviews. 4. Anthropologists—United States—Interviews.

I. Singh, Rani. II. Title.

CT275.S5429A5 1998

700'.92—dc21

98-45568

CIP

Elbow Press/Cityful Press books are edited by Steve Creson and Darrin Daniel
pob 4477 Seattle WA 98104-0477

Distributed by SPD 1341 Seventh St. Berkeley CA 94710

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Think of the Self Speaking

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Foreword

Harry Smith was a cosmological master, a filmmaker, painter, anthropologist, linguist, occultist and more. Smith saw the world through a grand schema of alchemical connections. Harry was proto-psychedelic. It was this all-inclusive aesthetic, the desire to show how "everything connects," that he felt best disclosed the elemental structure of human existence.

In order to fully appreciate the information presented herein, one must understand the physicality of the man, and his living conditions that an interviewer had to encounter—that is, if he agreed to be interviewed at all. Smith was a slight, gray ponytailed and bearded man with kind blue eyes and Coke bottle glasses of whatever prescription he could find. Always dressed in a shabby suit jacket, he had a slight hunchback, and long, bony, tobacco-stained hands. His room in Boulder, on the grounds of the Naropa Institute where I first met him, was furnished with a card table on which sat various dried gourds, tarot cards, glue, art supplies, marijuana, rocks, minerals, dried mushrooms, various unidentifiable objects, and neatly arranged books. There were two logs upon which guests would be seated, and the "vulva rock," a huge rock placed strategically under the heating vent. A few tree branches hung from the ceiling, a fabric of Marcus Garvey adorned one wall, Tibetan Tankas on another. Walking into any one of Harry Smith's

rooms was an experience like no other. Entering his zone, all conventional sense of time and reality would fade away. You were in the dimension of Smith.

Smith had an irascible nature. How outrageous could one be? His answers depended on his mood, his drug intake, and his financial situation at the time. He might bait the interviewer, challenging them to respond to the banter that subverted the conventions of the standard question-and-answer format. These interviews provide insight into a mind that could shift from the Music of the Spheres to the music of the Appalachian Mountains and make us see how they were one. They transport the reader to that singular plane that was "hanging out with Harry," the harmonic convergence of conversational buzz in all of its empathy, complexity, and scope, a stoned rush of ideas, a cerebral haze of analogy, allusion and metaphor. After a circuitous route across centuries, continents, and cultures, one would somehow arrive back at the same place, with everything making some sort of sense but in an entirely new way. Through this plethora of confusion a new clarity had emerged. One would walk out of his room, buzzing with new ideas, trying to put them all together, a scrawled list in one's pocket, of books to read, records to find, great lines, and connections one had never fathomed.

When one leaves the earth for the final time one leaves behind a finite amount of objects, memories, words, and translucent images from which to extract meaning. Smith left, lost, burned, sold or traded a museum's worth of artifacts, from paintings, films, recordings, lectures, overdue bills, to miscellaneous collections as varied as Seminole garments, string figures, tarot cards and paper airplanes. Curiously, for all of Smith's personal obfuscations, the interviews contained in this volume are the most intimate and revealing firsthand accounts, a direct connection to the man.

Spanning more than twenty-five years, this book presents a wide range of interviews, each one revealing a different facet of the man. Together, they present a panoply of truths, stories, and self-myths. These are seeds of information, as Smith states, "a piece of psychopathic literature"... "because truth is so greater a weapon than

falsehood." Some colorful anecdotes prove to be uncharacteristically exact, while some turn up false leads, clues of actuality and of deception. Even the falsehoods are the stuff of legend—often leading to a higher level of truth, an odd fact waiting to be turned over, an allusion to a person who might have different or more exacting information. A fitting example is Smith's claim of shaking the hands of Pythagoras and President Kennedy within the same breath; Smith's scope and outlook covered all the cosmic space in between.

Constant themes that run throughout this book include thoughts on his art, the development and vision of the *Anthology of American Folk Music*, film techniques, early influences and recollections of the Northwest, the procuring/stealing of records and books, drugs, basic subsistence in the face of poverty and the creative threads which somehow united all these areas of his life. The challenge of living was for Harry a constant struggle where destruction was as important as creation. Harry would always ask me, "Have you been creative today?"

Harry Smith reinvents himself entirely in each of these interviews. Each one complements and contradicts the one that came before. For the researcher and archivist, there are many truths here. The foundation is set, bones are laid out, and clues are posited with which to begin to decipher the mystery. The information contained herein is primary source material, which exists here and nowhere else. It's what Smith has left behind, in his own words. These are the truths left to us to unravel the mind that is Harry Smith. One can look at these interviews and see a man covering a vast amount of subjects in one sentence, or ranging from one idea to the next with a flick of an ash. One can see the the connections between his various interests and how Smith was piecing them together. His ideas as expressed in these interviews burgeoned into many media, and continue to flower—in his films, paintings, audio recordings, and his *Anthology of American Folk Music*. Harry Smith was ultimately an alchemist of the highest order, which is to say, a quintessential American Renaissance man.

—Rani Singh, Harry Smith Archives

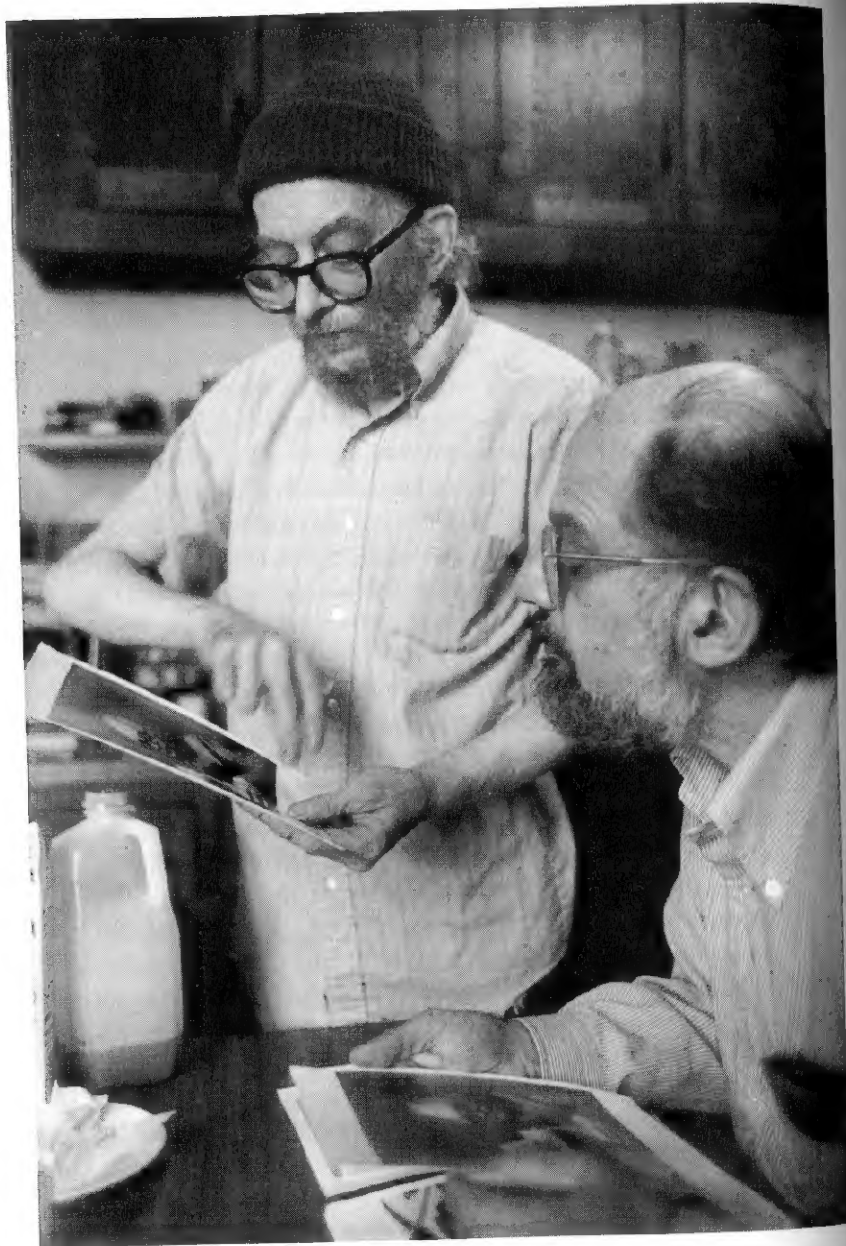


Photo by Brian Graham, 1985. Harry Smith with Allen Ginsberg

Introduction

Allen Ginsberg Interview with Hal Willner

When I was in San Francisco, I heard from a filmmaker, Jordan Belson, about a fabulous alchemical magician painter-filmmaker, Harry Smith, who had been a student or descendant of Aleister Crowley, and had Crowley manuscripts. Smith created the first materials for casting oil colors on a mirror through a projector and projecting it on the wall, which grew into the psychedelic mixed-media light shows of the '60s. That was Harry Smith's equipment originally, which he left to Jordan Belson and others in San Francisco, during the Berkeley Renaissance of 1948.

In 1960 I saw this old guy [at the Five Spot, NYC] with black and white beard making little marks, listening to Thelonious Monk, and sort of notating something. From Belson's description and from the concentration of his activity and his locale, I decided maybe that's Harry Smith, so I went up and introduced myself. He said, yes, that was his name. I said, "Well, what are you doing there?" He said, "I'm trying to determine where Monk comes in on the beat—before or after, what are the recurrent syncopations, what is the pattern, the mathematical pattern of syncopations in his solos, and how they vary." I said, "Why are you doing that?" He said, "Well, I'm keeping track of his time, because I'm using his music as background to films that I'm making, hand painting frame-by-frame, and collage drawings." By this time he'd already made [his] early

experimental films, as well as the complete *Heaven and Earth Magic* film. All the films you can get from [Film-Makers' Cooperative and Arthouse].

So one thing led to another and we listened to Monk night after night. Then Harry invited me up to his studio. He apparently saw very few people there, but we had a common interest in Tibetan Buddhist imagery and in drugs, because I'd already had mescaline. He lived [at] 401 1/2 East 70th, I think, off Lexington, or something like that, in a little tiny building on the second floor. He had a crowded little apartment and the walls were covered with his paintings, which were these amazing cosmic monsters. Sort of like the idea of a giant city which looks like some kind of strange leviathan, but then within the city are all sorts of patterns, traffic patterns, eyes, and people walking around and automobiles or strange machines or flying saucers. But the whole thing, maybe four feet by three feet, [was] very finely done and painted or watercolored, like Blake, sort of. He made these huge anthropomorphic cities and many other things.

I was really amazed he took me up to his little apartment. It was not a studio, it was a little apartment with very low ceilings. [He'd] get me very high on grass, then turn on his little projector and show me these movies, which he had hand painted, frame-by-frame, some abstract and then moving on into animated collage, then moving on to Tibetan imagery, and finally the *Heaven and Earth* movie, which was an hour and a half at the time.

What he had done was set a lot of them, certain ones of them, short ones, to *Misterioso*—or I've forgotten what others. I saw that his point was that the actual frames moved in relation to the music—he had been calculating the frames to the Monk music. In addition, he had a theory that the time of movement would be a crosscurrent of the alpha rhythm, certain kinds of brain waves, the average heart-beat pattern, certain biological rhythms and crosscurrents in the human body, and he was animating his collages and setting the time according to archetypal body rhythms. His references to this were certain drumming patterns of the Australian Aborigines [and] Zulu music.

It turns out he was a musicologist. He showed me this set of six records, *The Anthology of American Folk Music*, a three-box set he put out way back in 1952, which was on Folkways. He did ethnomusicology studies here in America. This box-set was a historic bomb in American folk music. It turned on Peter, Paul and Mary, turned on the whole folk music world at that time, including Ramblin' Jack Elliott and everyone else. It was a treasure of American blues [and] mountain musics. Happy Traum, everybody, including Dylan, [were] affected by it. Jerry Garcia learned blues from Harry Smith's records, according to Garcia.

So this is now eight years later, and he had gotten into making these films and had already passed through the mixed-media projections. His field was visual art as well as ethnomusicology. One day he had no money and he offered to sell me a rather dark version of the rather long *Heaven and Earth* movie for one hundred dollars. Everytime we'd go up there he'd get me high, then he'd ask me for money, because he was starving. Apparently, he went around doing that with everybody. He had no source [of income] but he was a genius, like the painter Albert Pinkham Ryder. I got to be scared of going up there because he'd get me tremblingly high on grass and show me these amazing movies. I'd be totally awed and intimidated by the universality of his genius in music and painting. In addition, he could write mad long, long poems, rhymed. But he'd always hit me up for money, if he could capture me, get me up there and hypnotize me with his films.

I took the *Heaven and Earth* movie—I didn't have any use for it. I didn't have a projector, so I took it down to Jonas Mekas, whom I knew through Robert Frank. Mekas had never heard of him. He played the film and said, "Who is this Harry Smith? He's an absolute genius." [That's how] Smith connected with the Film-Makers' Co-op and Anthology Film Archives and became, with [Stan] Brakhage and Robert Frank and [Andy] Warhol, one of the founding fathers of underground film and an influence on subsequent MTV.

Harry was a drinking fellow. He'd get very cantankerous and destroy his own stuff, [when] he drank sometimes, if people weren't

properly respectful, and didn't give him money. Around that time I introduced him to [Timothy] Leary, who had an entourage of millionaires. They sank maybe one hundred or two hundred thousand dollars in a giant film that Harry was to make called, *The Wizard of Oz*. Only eight minutes were ever made, but it's a great eight minutes. It's hardly ever been seen, but will be. He'd already made that *Tree of Life* [points to collotype print], which you'll see in a brass frame in my living room. That was something he did in the late '40s, because he knew a lot of Qabalah. I believe he had come East the first time with Philip Lamantia, the poet. They'd come together crossing the country and sleeping on the floor of some esoteric Qabalistic son of a Rabbi, who was legendary on the Lower East Side [Lionel Ziprin].

So now, ten years later, he was living in the Chelsea Hotel. I think at this time [he] was working with the money that Leary's friends had supplied, and already started another gigantic project, which was *Mahagonny*. It was to be projected on a screen, four images simultaneously, through [Victorian-archaic stage frames] he had designed. Through these four frames he'd have four projectors projecting different moving-picture images and colors onto a giant screen. The films would run simultaneously in certain random combinations that he'd designed in advance. So you've got four going at once, and an infinite number of combinations of them.

He gave only one live exhibition of *Mahagonny* at [Anthology Film Archives] back in the early '80s or late '70s. But he was so drunk and angry at everybody that he actually destroyed some of the glass plate frames that he used with some of the materials and the projectors. He had a tendency to destroy his own work very often.

In 1965 he recorded the first Fugs album. He did it on his own, then gave it to ESP. He was friends with Moe Asch of Folkways, and Asch had constantly supplied him with money. If he wasn't near someone else he'd always go hit up Moe Asch, who dreaded his coming—or Harry said he dreaded his coming. Asch was the guy who invented, subsidized, and managed Folkways Records.

By 1970, at the Chelsea Hotel, I was working with [Barry] Miles on this gigantic project of putting together all of my recorded poetries. Miles was living at the Chelsea, so I was there listening to tapes. This was the point where Miles had assembled all the tapes, copied them, and was playing me variant versions of "Howl" and "Sunflower [Sutra]"—so we could decide which was the earliest, the best emotionally, the best recorded in terms of sound. Harry was down on another floor, engaged in a long recording project called *Materials for the Study of Religion and Culture in the Lower East Side*, which included murderers babbling on amphetamine in the streets, jump-rope rhymes, bawdy songs, rap, [the] complete canon of Gregory Corso's early poetry, all of Peter Orlovsky's songs—which are still at Folkways—at a time when Peter was absolutely great-voiced.

Harry was also part of a project of recording all of my songs, at a time when I was making up a lot of songs, and still prolific in that area. The songs we recorded were basically the songs from the book *First Blues*. Later, I put them all out, because it was the first time I'd written songs. I guess I was inspired to music first by mantra chanting, then setting Blake to music, then Dylan put his hand in and got me interested, and then meeting Happy Traum. Harry recorded me a capella, or just with the Benares harmonium, as it says [on] the liner notes. He actually recorded every single song I knew, several times, until we got the right one he liked. He was a genius with the microphone—because it was in the drab room in the Hotel Chelsea on his Wollensak—that, I think, he'd gotten either from me or from Moe Asch. It cost a couple of hundred bucks, and he really used it. The entire first Fugs album, which is the classic one, was just recorded with one microphone on the Wollensak.

At these sessions, probably recorded in 1971, Harry amassed this massive [collection of recordings]. About sixteen reels. There are several versions of each. We recorded over weeks and weeks. I'd come every week or twice a week or three times a week and we did quite a lot, and in between he was recording Peter, Gregory, and

other people in the hotel. I believe all the material went to [the] Folkways archives, so there's this great rich treasury of stuff from 1971-72.

When he got kicked out of the Chelsea, he brought all of his tapes up to Moe Asch, and they were sitting more or less unlabeled in reel-to-reel boxes. Years later, Asch approached [Sam] Charters and said, "We've got all [this] material from Ginsberg and we always wanted to put out a record of his." Asch had since the '60s, actually. Asch was an old lefty and I was reviving the spirit of the American Left Wing rebellion. Harry was too tangled up on amphetamine, or whatever he was taking, to do anything with all the material he amassed, so Moe Asch gave it over to Sam and Ann Charters. They went through everything and put together this album, which came out on Folkways. It was issued in 1981 as Folkways Records [37560] called, *Allen Ginsberg Singing and Accompanying Himself on the Benares Harmonium*.

Now Harry, of course, as usual, cantankerous, perfectionist, said, "Well, they got all the wrong takes of it." "There's a much better one of 'Prayer Blues,'" he kept saying, but I never had access to the tapes, so I don't know what he preferred. One thing I remember he kept saying is, "It's all right," I was tapping my foot, and he said, "Do that heavier." I said, "Won't the tape pick it up?" He said, "Yeah, that's what the old blues people used to do." Bang. Make little drum notes on the guitars or bang their foot on the floor, so that's part of the rhythm thing. I was amazed at his openness to whatever happened. He did have a good ear, better than me, so he got straightened out and started over again. The one thing that Harry liked most of all on that album was the "Bus Ride Ballad Road to Suva." He thought that was the most interesting song, because it was a "Come-all-ye" sort of a classical thing. Like a chantey.

Then Harry went into a funny kind of amphetamine tailspin. He got really paranoid and got moved out of the Chelsea, I think, or expelled or something. He couldn't pay his rent, and wound up in a series of other hotels, including the Breslin Hotel, by 1984. But [he] wouldn't talk to anybody, wouldn't talk to me, maybe because

I didn't supply him with money, because I was broke at the time. I remember going down 13th Street in a taxicab and seeing him pass by near University Place, and I called out "Harry!" He looked at me and turned away—high, as if he'd seen the Devil. I was a little relieved, because every time I saw him he'd put the pressure on me for money.

Around that time Harry was visited by Henry Geldzahler and Robert Frank, who were the judges for the New York State Awards for Film. They were handing out forty [or] fifty thousand dollar awards, and they gave one to Harry. When he was asked what he did with it, I think he wrote on his official reply form that he shot it up, and drank it up, or something like that. Cocaine or heroin. Not that he did, actually. But [the grant] funded *Mahagonny*. He was making *Mahagonny* around that time, as well as making a lot of beautiful drawings.

I didn't see Harry for a long while and began visiting and [seeing him again] at the Breslin Hotel, on 28th Street and Broadway. Same problem, still wanting money, but this time he had built up an enormous library. I had this very expensive book I brought back from Australia by Strehlo, *Australian Aborigine Poetics*. It cost me fifty dollars and there were no more copies in the United States. He had this extraordinary technical ethnological library and he borrowed it from me and he wouldn't give it back. I only got it back after he died, when we got together an inventory of his books.

In that room at the Breslin—the whole room was taken up with shelves of books and records, then a movie editing table, and a tiny bed. I have some photographs of that, of him pouring milk, *The Alchemist Transforming Milk into Milk*. In the bathroom he had a little birdie that he fed and talked to, and let out of his cage all the time. When his little birds died he put their bodies in the freezer. He'd keep them for various alchemical purposes, along with a bottle, which he said was several years' deposits of his semen, which he was also using for whatever magic structures.

Finally he had to leave the Breslin for some reason or other, in 1984 or 1985. He was still drinking a bit. I'd invited him to stay with

me for a couple of weeks, till he found a place, but the second week he was there a car backed into him. He had a compression fracture of his knee, so he wound up staying with me for eight months. Eight stormy, but amazing months. During that time I asked him if he would design the book covers I was using for my *Collected Poems* and *White Shroud*. I commissioned him to make one drawing for "Journal Night Thoughts," a poem that I had written when I first knew him. He got me high on grass in my kitchen, I think in 1960 or '61. It's all politics and serpents and ethnomusicology—a description of Harry staring at me high and [me] slightly paranoid in my own kitchen, looking at Harry like a wizened old magician. A friendly one.

He got an invitation to go to Cherry Valley with Claude Pelieu, a French poet, and Mary Beach, the niece of the great Sylvia Beach, of Shakespeare and Company bookshop in Paris, of the '20s, a friend of [James] Joyce and [Ezra] Pound. So [Harry] went up there, made this huge collection of old keys and country influence from the 19th century in Cooperstown, which is a historically old place—the Baseball Hall of Fame and a Farmer's Museum. Apparently, he had some problems with them, or they had problems with him. He came back to New York and [had] nowhere to live, and was going from house to house. I wouldn't have him back because he was such a difficult person to live with [while] drinking.

I didn't see or hear of him for awhile, and then Brian Graham, Robert Frank's assistant photographer, who's a friend, and was doing work with me in photography, said that he had seen Harry. Harry was living in a Franciscan flophouse on the Bowery. He'd heard that Harry was ill. So one day I went with Peter, and maybe Brian, to go see Harry, and there was Harry sitting in this little tiny cubicle, piled with books, rare books, that he'd begged, borrowed, or stolen. He used to go to Samuel Weiser's and Weiser would give him any books he wanted, on credit, because he knew that Harry was a fantastic bibliophile, read everything, and had a photographic memory.

So Harry was sitting in there, in a room that in order to get in and out he had to move books aside. I couldn't get in the room with him. I had to talk to him from the half-opened door. It turned out that he had gotten so weak from malnutrition that he couldn't very easily get out to go get food. He had no money anyway, and he was starving. But he had all these books. So I told him he'd better come back and stay with me for awhile. He recovered some, since we had good food here.

One problem was that he was toothless, and his mouth was full of decayed, abcessed teeth. His friend, Dr. Joe Gross, was trying to arrange [a] mouth operation, but Harry was adamant. So he couldn't eat. One time, when he had drank himself into a coma, maybe eight years before, probably the reason he left the Chelsea, he was taken to St. Vincent's. When he woke up he found there were tubes in his mouth and down his throat, feeding him. He ripped them all out, and tore some flap in the back of his throat, so he no longer could swallow easily. All he could eat was certain kinds of pea soup and mashed bananas. It was horrifying to eat with him at the table, because he gurgled up all the saliva. By this point he could hardly eat anything. So we nursed him back to good health.

Then I had the occasion to go down to Mississippi, to the Southern Folklore Center, to do a reading. I had invited my stepmother, who was then eighty-four or so, and it suddenly occurred to me that that would be perfect for Harry, because it would take him to the Delta. There was the Southern Folklore Center with the guy that runs it, [who was a] musicologist, a specialist in blues, whom I had met and who was a fan of Harry Smith; one of the few scholars who knew who Harry was. So we took a plane down and lived there for a couple of weeks. Harry stayed on, then came back, stayed with me, and I had to figure a way of getting rid of him.

Then it was time to go to Naropa, so I invited him to Naropa, and he came and stayed that summer with me in an apartment. He liked it enough, so we settled him in a little clapboard house, twenty feet away from the Poetics Department, right on the campus of Naropa. He had this marvelous role as the campus philosopher and gnome,

in a teahead place, where brilliant young students could go and sit, smoke pot with him, talk about ethnomusicology and strange patterns of behavior among the islanders, and Zulu music rituals. This would be 1988 till his death.

The amazing thing was that in the last year of his life he was awarded a Grammy for the advancement of American folk music. I saw a video of the Grammy Award ceremony. He was dressed up in a tuxedo without a tie, and he stumbles trying to climb on the stage, he gets up there, he's given a moment to make a speech, and says very briefly that he's happy to live long enough to see the American political culture affected and moved and shaped somewhat by American folk music, meaning the whole rock and roll, Bob Dylan, Beatnik, post-Beatnik youth culture. It was a very beautiful speech, because it very briefly said that the philosophy of the American Negro, as expressed in the music, the philosophy of the homeless and the Negro, and the minority and impoverished, of which he was one, starving in the Bowery actually, and [after] all that while, to see that experience alter the consciousness of America sufficiently to alter the politics.

The amazing thing [is] that all during the period that he was with me, and even in the Bowery, Francis House, he was recording the dying coughs and prayers of impoverished sick people in the adjacent cubicles. When he was with me he made several hundred hours of recordings in the house and out the window of the ambient sounds of Manhattan Island. [He] put his microphone in such a way that it sucked in all the sounds from the Brooklyn Bridge, all the way up and down from different windows, from the south and the north. The sequence of these recordings climaxed on July 4th, with all the fireworks in the city exploding out.

His last few years, except for physical ills, were when he was appreciated and when he had a chance to expand his knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism. He had a chance to teach and affect a great many younger people, who were eager for his words, his grass, and his music, and to slightly influence the culture of American Buddhism—to actually lecture and have his lectures recorded, to have

a number of students write down his words, take down his casual conversation, and have his films shown in the university.

The most affecting moment was when he was invited by Stan Brakhage, and the guys that ran the film school at [the University of] Colorado, who worshipped his films, and had been trying to get him there for years. [They] had a big showing of his films at a giant auditorium. He was kind of fragile—not feeble, but fragile. He had to go down this long stairway aisle to sit down and explain the films, [to] speak a little, and Steven Taylor accompanied him. It was like an enormous [passage] of musical generations. Steven by then was so totally appreciative, seeing Harry as a grandfather, wisdom teacher, breaking out in such a nice final ripening.

He returned [to New York] to get his Grammy, leaving his cabin filled with books and dead sparrows and mice in the refrigerator, the log on which he sat, some paintings, all his books. He came to New York with his six cats, living in the Hilton for quite a while, then moved to the Chelsea. Meanwhile, he built up a phalanx of assistants there, including one marvelous woman, Rani Singh, who sort of bullied him, mothered him, got him his food stamps and got his S.S.I., and got his checks taken care of. So she's taken on the job of supervising the archive.

He died at the Chelsea. Rani Singh, the secretary, was with him all day, trying to get him to go to a hospital, and he kept saying, "No, I'm dying. I'll die." Rani went to get her car. Paola Iglori went to stay with him, and suddenly he said, "I'm dying," and he threw up blood, then fell over.

I went that night to the St. Vincent's morgue, as soon as I heard about it. I got permission to go downstairs in the morgue and pulled him out of the wall on this giant drawer. His face was somewhat twisted up, there was a little blood on his whitish beard. So I sat and did the traditional Tibetan liturgy, refuge liturgy, and then spent an hour meditating.

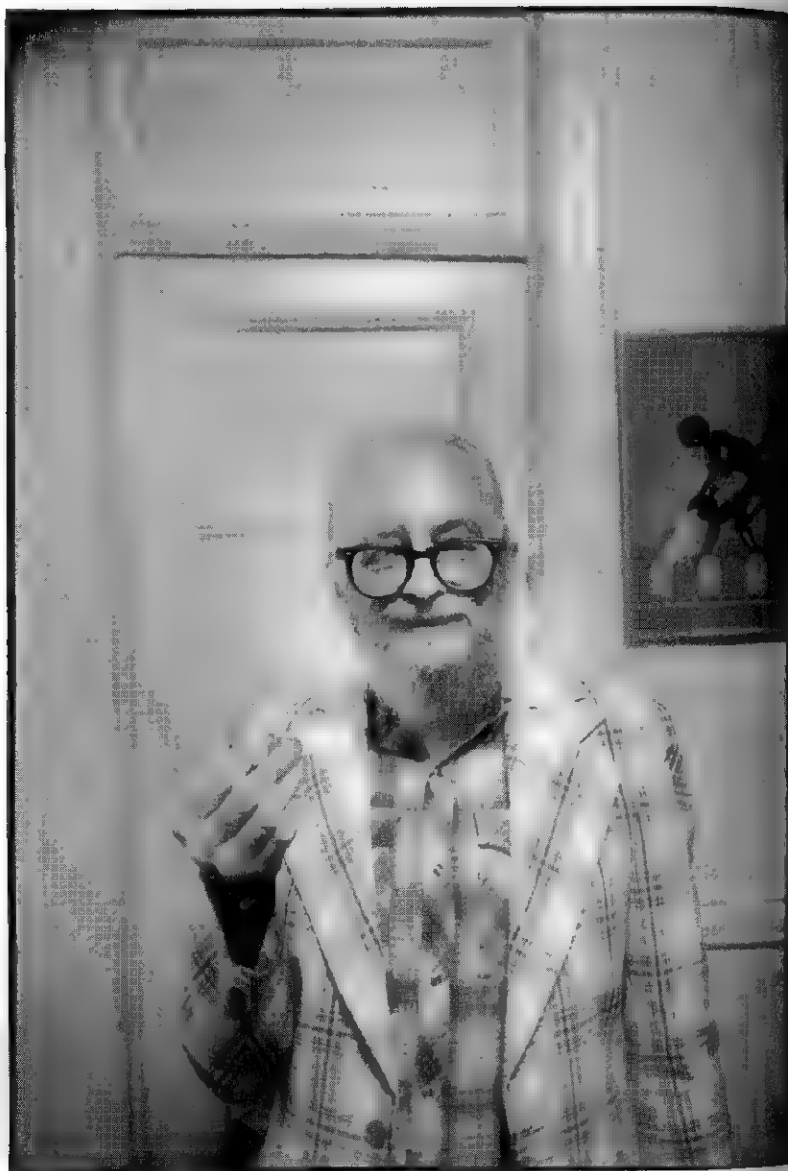


Photo by Allen Ginsberg, 1988—courtesy Fahey/Klein Gallery

Gary Kenton—Breslin Hotel, NYC

Harry and his surroundings were both somewhat decrepit when these recordings were made. According to his own account, sickliness was something of a lifelong condition, but I never knew how much of Harry's autobiographical information to believe. No doubt his ill-health was compounded by lifelong predilection for mind-altering substances. During our 1983 talk at the Breslin Hotel, I was distracted by the cockroaches which kept crawling in and out of Harry's glass of beer. I don't know whether it was by luck or design, but Harry never reached for his glass while the roaches were on one of their forays.

All conversations with Harry were interesting, but I don't know how much academic interest these conversations hold. I was seeking factual data regarding Harry's recording, his seminal contribution to the field of folk music, and personal reflections on his dealings with Mr. Asch, but Harry was reluctant to say anything for fear of...what?

Listening now, I feel I made a great mistake to come to Harry with an agenda. I thought I was doing a book on Mr. Asch, but I should have just listened to whichever story Harry chose to tell. I had the sense to follow some of his excursions, but you will hear our mutual testiness. I wanted factual information, which Harry was reluctant

to divulge. My guess is that in addition to his pervasive paranoia, there was some resentment on Harry's part about being asked to talk about Moe Asch rather than the life work of Harry Smith. Despite this, I found Harry to be utterly charming. He frustrated me at times, but I came to think of his recalcitrance as not a lack of cooperation but as an inability to think in a linear fashion. He simply refused to narrow the philosophical confines of his thinking. Of course, this made him less than adept at most practical endeavors. Then again, I sometimes felt that his resistance was just so much mischief. An intellectual mischief-maker—I suppose that is one definition of an artist.

—Gary Kenton, November 9, 1997

HS: Now, I would prefer that you occasionally as—like when you make a recording for a life insurance company, occasionally announce, “You do understand, Harry, that this is being recorded.”

GK: Right. Okay.

HS: But before we start recording, you've tested the levels? They're okay and everything?

GK: Yeah.

HS: I would like to say that we—that I've been with Gary to Suhihero Restaurant, where I drank some beer for the first time in four or five days. I've had one quart of beer that's lasted over a week, which the remains are over there. I've also smoked a little marijuana—which I—first time I heard Woody Guthrie play, which was in Joe Beck's Union Hall in San Francisco during the 1940s, was also the first time that I smoked marijuana—not with Woody, but with the friends that I had gone with to hear him sing. So I consider that to be rather romantic. It was while I was in San Francisco during, I'd say, the middle 1940s. So that I've taken a couple of tokes on a pipe of marijuana, have drunk some beer, and earlier had taken valium. Therefore, any and all statements I make are subject to drug-induced errors. Now, Gary, if you'd like to proceed with the question period.

GK: I should say, Mr. Smith has also been assured that he will see copies of this material. Of course, we say that to all our interviewees.

HS: No, no, no! I'm always happy to be recorded if I'm in good spirits. Because truth is so greater a weapon than falsehood. So it says in *The Threepenny Opera*, “That for once mercy will triumph over justice.” That I do want to try to be truthful and I've been sick for—well, let's put it this way, I was a sickly child and it hasn't stopped. I'm in my second childhood, although the other day when I was speaking to a friend of mine from India—who lives in India, among other places—and I said “second childhood,” and he said, “*second* childhood!” Implying, I think, that I'd never got out of the first one.

GK: All right, the \$64,000 question: When did you first meet Moses Asch?

HS: When did I first meet Moses Asch?

GK: How much before that were you aware of him, if at all?

HS: Well, I bought whatever the labels that his earlier things were. I don't remember them now.

GK: Asch and...

HS: And Stinson maybe, he had something to do with—I don't know—all the records.

GK: But you knew who he was as a...

HS: Well, I saw his name on the label with Norman Granz or something. I mean, of course, I bought the things like the Woody Guthrie records, and Lead Belly, I believe, was my favorite artist on that record. I forget what it was. Maybe it was...

GK: Disc?

HS: It was a white label. It was Disc, yeah. It was a white label with red and blue circles on it.

GK: Yeah, that's probably Disc.

HS: They were the first things that were available.

GK: So you were aware of who he was?

HS: No, I wasn't aware of who he was. At that age I wasn't aware of who I was, or much of what anything was, except the woods and the beach and the water. And the mountains. Because this was in Seattle, Washington, in the early forties.

GK: So when was it that you met Mr. Asch?

HS: When I came to New York.

GK: Which was when?

HS: I really can't establish the year. I believe it was 1950. That's—you don't have to write that down, Mr. C.I.A. man. That's a record, you know. I don't know who makes it—the Ramones or somebody—*Mr. C.I.A. Man*. I wasn't so much aware of who Mr. Asch was. Let's put it this way, I'd seen his name on the label and I never had seen John Hammond's name. I didn't hear him till years later.

GK: How did you come into contact?

HS: When I came to New York I'd left Berkeley and was living near Post and Buchanan in San Francisco. I couldn't tolerate one more second of, you know, Wheeler Hall, or something.

I lectured occasionally on jazz or some allied subject on the basis mostly of Charles Edward Smith's, I believe, records—whoever those early people that recorded in New Orleans and the Library of Congress Records.

I considered them to be of a—Lead Belly and the Golden Gate Quartet doing "Pick a Bale of Cotton." Or, as Shel Silverstein says, "When the cotton's getting rotten, it's a lot of rotten cotton." What was your question again, Doctor?

GK: When you came to New York, how you...

HS: I shipped all my stuff collect and—however, in various batches. Most of it I lost because—I mean my most valuable belongings, you know, my collection of large-size Kwakiutl and Swinomish ceremonial paraphernalia. The large things, like house—entire houseposts and stuff I gave to the museum at the University of Washington, where I was making a desperate attempt to study anthropology. See, this is years before I discovered that Lévi-Strauss is probably the greatest living novelist, along with Frances Yates. So the [boxes] were shipped separately, and someone who I'd been in contact with a bit before, through George Andrews—oh, I'm glad I have more tape. You don't want me to go into that—how I got—how George had given me these shoes that were supposed to have come from the head of the Rosicrucians of Belgium, and—so anyhow, I arrived here penniless, and was at the mercy of friends. I got off at Penn Station and walked north. I'd heard the gardens at Rockefeller Center were so fantastic, but I passed by them thinking they were some kind of shrubbery, and missed them, and got as far as 89th Street, where I actually ran into someone I knew. Well, George turned me over to someone named Pete Kauffman, who was a—I hope he's alive—had an excellent collection of records. And I knew of him. I believe we'd corresponded. Or possibly Sir James McKuen had corresponded.

Well, in the meantime, all this vast number of—every week a new Sleepy John Estes record and a new Bukka White record, so that they had piled up to impossible proportions. Pete suggested that maybe Moe Asch, you know—he collects—he [maybe] would buy

some of them. Because Pete had put up, I believe, two hundred dollars to get the records out. That collection is now in Lincoln Center. Those were my 78s, and John Hammond, although he didn't like my selection of records in some cases—his first words to me, incidentally, from John Hammond were, "First of all, I want you to forget that my sister is married to Benny Goodman." I was wearing a tweed suit that was so worn that I had taken scotch tape—I mean masking tape—and mended the holes in the elbow and then taken a pen and drawn a picture of the tweed on it. However, during that lunch I bent my elbow and the thing came loose. Well, anyhow that's another...

GK: So when you came to Moses Asch, you were coming to him to sell some of your 78s.

HS: 78s, records that were in excess, because you cannot practically listen to seventy or eighty Sleepy John Estes records. I have about twelve hundred records here. I can't—it's always simpler to buy a new record than to try to tackle this batch of stuff. But when I do, I find records that I'd gotten ten or fifteen years ago that astound me. My favorite record now is one that I just automatically got because it's in the Dutch Philips UNESCO series, Volume One, Bengal. I play it all the—you know, it's the only thing I play. And I never play records when I'm by myself, I only play them when other people are around.

GK: So what...?

HS: I look at them, I gloat over them. I try to pick out which—you know, I'm only kidding, but it'll go in the book as if I actually said it. I'll be like Zasu Pitts in [Von Stroheim's] *Greed*. I rise out of the bed in the morning and roll in records—like she rolled in money—I'll roll in records. I'll listen to them all.

GK: To me, a book is a method of crucifixion, as far as I'm concerned.

HS: *What?* You're going to do *that* to me?

GK: Yes.

HS: On top of everything else?

GK: Yes. Just a slower and more malicious method.

HS: What is?

GK: A book. To have a book come out is a more slow, a more delicious method of crucifixion—to get someone to crucify themselves over a long period of time. I'm feeding your paranoia here. So did he buy these records from you?

HS: Yes. They were thirty-five cents apiece, and about the fifth go-around I showed up, and Mr. Asch, who was built somewhat like he is now, but was smaller—it was a very small office.

GK: He was still on 42nd Street?

HS: Next to the radio station, whatever it is.

GK: Right. EVD.

HS: What?

GK: EVD.

HS: WEVD, of course.

GK: Right.

HS: Folkways was across the hall. His chief assistant was Marian Distler.

GK: Is she—do you know, is she alive?

HS: No. According to Mr. Asch, she is dead. She died, I believe, very close to the day that I left for Oklahoma. I said to Mr. Asch—I was drunk and in some fancy hotel with a view of the cupids on the ceiling—I forget what it's called—but these people were from Conrad Rooks, the filmmaker, who starred himself as Buddha in *Siddhartha*, et cetera. And the poor man took me to dinner a couple of weeks ago, and, yeah, he always wore a purple sweater—Mr. Asch—and he'd sort of lean against the window, because there were really only two rooms. Occasionally, someone else—Harold Courlander—would come in. I often wonder about him, because he was a very sort of aloof person.

GK: You're talking about...?

HS: Courlander. One of the best books for musical transcriptions is—I don't know what it is. It's over there somewhere. I think it's called *American Negro Folksongs*, or something like that.

GK: Or *Negro Folk Music, U.S.A.*

HS: Yeah, that's it. One of the earliest Library of Congress records is pretty well done. It's as well done as can be done in the

type of notation that is made for extremely rigid music. I being at this point an exponent of what's called the Pneumatic System. My two main sources being 12th century Bulgarian manuscripts and Kauffman's *Tibetan Buddhist Chants*. Oh, no, also Novinsky Raunchglitzer's—whatever the appendix to that—his last book where it connects them with the Byzantine chants. It's a Byzantine method of notation that indicates the limits within which you may improvise. It doesn't make the music permanent. And like tagims, in the linguistic theory of the same disposition, you can always insert new elements. Okay, so I covered the Moe Asch office.

GK: So he's sitting there in his...

HS: No, he's not sitting...

GK: ...standing next to the window in his purple sweater.

HS: Miss Distler was typing away. I don't know where he recorded—in the same building, no doubt. That's of course how I met Sonny Terry and Blind Boy Fuller, was in the Folkways offices. I was especially, you know—and always bought every Sonny Terry record. Columbia brought the first one out.

GK: So when did you...?

HS: Mr. Asch is getting more and more puzzled, and he said something like, "What are you doing this for?" Well, I need the money. I've got the records. I'm sleeping on somebody's sofa. He said, "Why don't you bring out an album of these things?" Because I don't really know whether he had heard Bugle Boy before. I finally got rid of all of Bugle Boy, because I decided I didn't much like him. At this point I'm desperately searching for records, reissues of records that I sold to Mr. Asch at that time—I believe was thirty-five cents. He said, "You'd make more by bringing out this stuff," because he'd evidently shown it to someone—I don't know who—and they knew I was selling him the cream of the crop.

GK: Right.

HS: That I'd actually listened to the things. I only bring that up because I'm so often accused of not listening to the records. I listened to them all at least once or twice, you know—when I'd buy them, and inflict ones that I think are good on my friends for nine-

hour periods at a time. Quite a few people come here and expect to hear records. Although, of course, for the last two months I've been working on the notes for a Folkways album.

GK: What is the title of that album?

HS: The title hasn't been decided on, and I don't know what Mr. Asch's decision is.

GK: What is the name of the artist?

HS: Charles Compo. [*Seven Flute Solos*, Folkways 37463, 1981]

GK: Charles Compo? So Asch convinced you to make what eventually became the three-volume set of *American Folk Music*, right?

HS: Yes. At the time I wanted to include the music—various arguments developed around—there was supposed to be a fourth album, and that's what I started to say about Harold Courlander, was that I did get sort of a laugh out of it, or a smile at least, when I said, "Well, there was supposed to be four albums, you know, like for earth, air, fire, and water; red, blue, yellow, and green." And this is before I knew that he'd been to Haiti. He'd already issued his Haitian records. But he did understand that there was a—I thought later, gee, I was kind of mean to that nice man, because at heart he was a metaphysician. "Roll Old Jeremiah" is the name of the thing that I said was fairly well transcribed in his book. And a large number of other things.

GK: You didn't own all of the recordings that ended up on those records. You had to go from that point and collect from other sources. Am I correct?

HS: No, no! Of course I owned all those records. In most cases I owned all of the records by all of my favorite artists. I mean, the great soul-searching about what to put in and what to leave out.

GK: So, in other words, it all came from your personal collection at that point?

HS: Yes. My collection of 78s. Don't you remember?

GK: I had assumed, incorrectly, that once you started putting out the project that you also sought from other sources. I didn't know those all came from your own collection.

HS: There *were* no other sources.

GK: You had purchased them originally, right? They were available for sale in the first place.

HS: Why, *yes*, but they were like smashed into smithereens during the so-called "Record Drive" of World War II, in order to find out if they were laminated. I mean, somebody comes across a really good King Oliver record that somebody had, Bam! A friend of mine comes across a pretty good King Oliver during the thing that had been broken in half to find out whether it had—and the King Oliver record may be worth as much as a hundred dollars. Although about one hundred and twenty dollars if it was brand new in the original envelope.

GK: Right.

HS: Most of the records I have—the Paramount Records came from the place called the Central General Store, on Long Island. When the Crash occurred, of course, many record stores were stuck with the entire stock, and the stocks were just put away. That's what a person looked for. There was no, you know, whatever those labels are—County or something—that created Yazoo.

GK: And Rounder. Right. I know.

HS: Well, Rounder's a good company.

GK: Yeah, right.

HS: I have a lot of Rounder records.

GK: So you put together the three-record set, and that came out in 1952.

HS: Probably. I don't know. Everything is signed in it with that type of a signature that I make, see? This is February first, or is it the twentieth?

GK: Today is March first.

HS: I mean March first, you know. It's signed like that, see? [draws example]

GK: Right.

HS: But this is like an *H* and an *S*—*HS*.

GK: Here you go, but...

HS: Are you kidding? That was tricky. He just got me to sign a release under the pretext of being an autograph collector. I mean, I'll fall for anything. Let me see what my chances of survival are now.

So Mr. Asch—I was honored by so many things, by meeting Mr. Asch at that point, and I would name some of the artists that have never been issued. So they're at Lincoln Center, see? You know that I had mentioned earlier that John Hammond and Mr. Asch suggested I go to the public library and sell them. I was selling them for, I forget what, two dollars apiece or something—that they considered absolutely exorbitant, you know, because it was hundreds and hundreds of records. All of them brand new. There was some fantastic Cajun record, but it was slightly worn—I forget what it was—because trying to pick out however many records there are in there—eighty-one or something, I'm ashamed to not have a set around, except that the recordings, as Mr. Asch says in the thing that you wrote about him, that I have a copy of here, notarized, that I received it on such and such a day and a tape recording of the telephone conversation—never mind. The cleaner sound, and Peter Bartok was the recording engineer. You know, the son of the great Hungarian composer, and one of the major inspirations of Mr. Compo, whose grandfather, Joseph Daltrey, founded the music department at Wesleyan University.

GK: Right.

HS: I'm putting a plug in for my next record. I hope Mr. Asch hears this. So, the project proceeded, but it required day-to-day supervision by Mr. Asch. I'm just naturally worthless—he's not too good either. I mean, at the same time that those things came out, I loaned him all my Sacred Harp records, enough to make an entire album. In 1952 I gave him the records to tape and he didn't find them. He said, "Are these...?" In 1982, thirty years later in other words, he finds them again. He says, "Are these maybe yours?" "Yes! For God—where did you...? Ah-hah!" There are very extensive notes on them, they're—all the tunes have been transcribed, but in standard notation. So occasionally he does lose things. Although the other day when I saw him he said, "I never lose anything." Because

he's a very humorous person, you know. Despite his—as Izzy Young says, and I won't apply it to Mr. Asch, but it's applicable to the general situation, "Within that rough exterior beats a heart of tinsel." But within Mr. Asch beats a heart of gold, actually.

GK: So he kept after you to finish that project. I mean, when you say it required his supervision, I take it you mean mostly that he just kept on you to finish it.

HS: Yes. I came there every day and there were a great number of things to do, you know. It was the first thing that had been done in that style typographically. Which was—I won't mention which particular little magazine. You mentioned a couple of them earlier.

GK: Right.

HS: And derived from that style. So that when he realized the enormous—and I say this out of self-respect and nothing more—the enormous richness of the collection that I had. And further, that every single record was brand new. How much were the records, the Paramount records from the Central General Store on Long Island? It was the address, but I guess it's central Long Island. Ten cents apiece, I believe. I mean, you know, at ten cents a piece they were—then on top of everything else, there were so many Blind Lemon Jeffersons and Ma Rainey's that there was—they were just all a matter to throw them out as being no good, because there was too damn many to listen to. And there were a few good—I have both of them on reissues at the present time, but of course, very little of the Paramount catalog was ever examined. And the Victors came from—I can't remember the place right now. It was in North Carolina—but I don't want to—it took me a little while to remember that the name was the Central General Store of central Long Island.

I wrote all over the country and advertised in a magazine called *The Record Changer*, for records. During the war, I was working at Boeing aircraft installing certain parts of radar.

GK: That was in the Northwest?

HS: In Bramburton [Bremerton], or whatever it's called, near Seattle. I don't know. They had like a hangar in the shape of a mountain that opened, and the entire factory had a painting of the

river. You didn't find that out until later. But on the assembly line certain things—that Norden bombsight and the radar—were kept secret so that only certain few people worked on [it]. You just adjusted one screw and that was it. Then somebody else did the next one so that no one would know the entire thing. So I was earning a lot of money, and was able to advertise in *The Record Changer*, for example, for certain records. Up to three hundred dollars I offered for records. Which was why I was kind of galled when Mr. Smith, the librarian at the public library, would ask me a few questions like what did I—never mind. I met Kurt Sachs in there, who tried to tell Dr. Smith something, and he said—Dr. Smith said—Sachs is, of course, extremely old; I mean, he's like—I've never seen a case quite like that, except Walter Goodman—and one of the greatest musicologists in the world said, "Some of the music in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is the most beautiful I have heard." Doctor, Professor, Mr., whatever, Smith said, "Ah, are you trying to be funny? There's no good music in that thing. I mean good music." I was—you know, astounded. I was insulted, you know, I was a little bit galled when I bought Crown for three hundred dollars and then turn around...

GK: Sell it to him for two dollars?

HS: Sell it for, I don't know how much they paid for them. I got, I think, three thousand dollars. Two or three thousand dollars. But it took them so long to pay that I spent all the money.

GK: Right. So you worked on it for about two years?

HS: What?

GK: The three-volume *Anthology*.

HS: Oh, no. I don't know. I began buying the records some time during the war.

GK: Right.

HS: No, shortly before. The first one, a Memphis Minnie, one by Reverend F. W. McGee, these were found in about one year intervals. In Everett, Washington, I found a Yank Rachell record that is one of the great masterpieces of—I won't give the title—of music. It's one of these Bluebird Records and it's well-recorded.

Boy, what a—a lot of the greatest things were not issued. See, what happened to the fourth volume, finally, was that Mr. Asch—I was like—I'd had an argument with Miss Distler. She wanted to include a particular song that's called—since Roosevelt had been elected—I don't know [singing], "We've got Franklin D. Roosevelt back again." I think it's by the Delmore Brothers or—it was not a good performance, as far as that set was concerned. The first criterion was excellence of performance, combined with excellence of words. Now, the fourth volume, for example, had "No Depression in Heaven," by the Carter Family, which is not only beautifully sung but has excellent words. I didn't like that record, and so they decided not to issue the album, because it was the, you know, whatever it's called, the immovable object meeting the irresistible force.

GK: She wielded a lot of power at Folkways?

HS: I don't know. I'm all for Women's Lib. I would like to say that, you know, I'm for the Equal Rights Amendment and a few other things, any other position being silly. Not that I would think, or any of my friends would think, of practicing it, but they should at least practice.

GK: Moses worked very closely with Marian and she shared in the decision-making process at Folkways at that time.

HS: Yes, well it was—you put the words in my mouth. I don't like to say that sort of thing, but it was a small company! A little tiny company.

GK: I'm asking you, you know.

HS: About as big as this room.

GK: Right. I'm trying to get more information about Mr. Asch, about his operation. That's what I'm doing here.

HS: That's what you're doing here? You should be—I don't know how to find out about Mr. Asch.

GK: I'm trying to find out about your experiences.

HS: I think he had his appendectomy in 1922, his liver transplant—this is the experimental one 1931. What was your question again? I think that his sense of humor is what has carried him

through. Now, he can scare me to death. I don't see him for years at a time because I don't like being yelled at.

GK: Why do you suppose he yells at you?

HS: Probably because he...

GK: He probably yells at everybody, but why you specifically?

HS: Well, probably because I'm, you know, snotty—I don't know. I might show up there drunk or announce that I have the greatest thing on earth—like in the light of—that's why the rent situation is so bad, because, you know, two months at the grindstone on breaking ground to try to undo the damage I did with the *Anthology of American*—what is it? I always get it confused—it's folk song? folk music? I mean, I think that thing's so old-fashioned that—I'd like to make a final statement on the subject.

On the other hand, both the Kiowa love songs album [*Kiowa Peyote Meeting*, Folkways 4601, 1973], which is a three-record album, and the Sacred Harp album, which I believe is two records—there were piles of file cards for a list of every single word used in the forty-nine songs.

GK: Now wait, are those two other volumes of music you put together?

HS: Well, yes, but they're not complete, see? That's what all these tapes and files are. I'll try to pull one out.

GK: Well, you know, you can just...

HS: Yeah, this is part of the—a transcription of the part that—"Song 37" fills this space.

GK: Right.

HS: This is "Song 38." And Everett Cozad is talking here, saying, "This flute was given to Kiowa by" and "I'm going to sing to you one song that my grandfather told me called, 'Singing.'"

GK: Right.

HS: He gives me the words, et cetera. Then the song is sung and then he tells the same story in Kiowa.

GK: So there's one album, Kiowa love songs, which you have compiled but has not been released?

HS: The great care with which these transcriptions are made, see—this is like sitting around—here where they say, “Hey, listen.” It was a highly complicated task, transcribing all the words off this album. And there’s a lot of work done on them.

GK: I understand, but...

HS: Then I discovered the source of the forty-nine songs, which is one of the main things. And the Sacred Harp records will have to be redone in Pneumatic transcription, see? This is the system I use. These are two renditions by the same person. That is, as you can see, the performance—you don’t have to understand anything about music to understand he’s singing two different things—they’re the same thing. This is the second part he’s singing. This is the greater authority. It’s from this manuscript. Please try to keep me on the subject with Mr. Asch.

GK: I’m trying.

HS: He’s the most lovable—is it time to turn the tape over?

GK: Almost.

HS: God, you mean there’s a whole—you’re playing this—what is this, a super slow...?

GK: So you’ve just described to me what are two records worth or two sets of records with material that have not been released as of yet.

HS: Yeah. That’s why I’m so determined to finish this one.

GK: I understand.

HS: That I have allowed myself to get to the point of eviction—I don’t care if I finish up the thing in, you know, in a men’s shelter. Jeez.

GK: I understand.

HS: I try to be a musicologist or something like that. I believe in the kinship of all life. And you used the word “humanism” earlier. It was the nicest of the words that I heard you use. Lévi-Strauss says that humanism begins at home. He actually says that in—at the end of, I believe it’s *The Origin of Table Manners*. That impurity—it’s in the part where he says that a man is disturbed by the—even man cannot face the prospect that he too one day will become a vanished

species. Which is the punishment to be meted out for having treated the world as if it were a thing and behaved toward it with neither decency or some other highfalutin’ word. At his best Lévi-Strauss is quite close to Brecht.

* * *

HS: Well, I don’t know how accurate—Can’t it sit on there? Well, it should face you also.

GK: Right, well, it’s a little closer to me than it is to you. It’s fine.

HS: Where is—which is the microphone? That? Okay. So you can ask me any type of questions you wish to, but I would prefer that they be—I don’t like to mention names of people.

GK: So I’ve...

HS: I’ve spoken to my lawyer, because I got in dreadful trouble with that before. Not in dreadful trouble—I mean it was solved in an instant when certain other facts were brought to the surface.

GK: I understand.

HS: And please remember that in your position—that you’re placing yourself in a desperate position, because you won’t know what to do. That scraping noise is—so any questions you wish to ask me that aren’t better handled either in published books or in...

GK: What could be better handled than hearing it directly from you?

HS: Well, it will only be a tape, and there’s no telling how many times the tape has been erased. Who is going to win the presidential election?

GK: For you, that’s a rather feeble attempt to get the conversation going in another direction.

HS: No, no, no.

GK: I won’t—fuck it, I’m sorry.

HS: I think it will be...

GK: I don’t know and I don’t care.

HS: ...Reagan.

GK: I’m afraid it might be, too. Who cares?

HS: It's not a matter of being afraid. It's just that it's—this is a prospect. So, any questions...

GK: Let me ask.

HS: ...you wish to ask?

GK: All right, as I told you before...

HS: This is a...

GK: ...I feel like I'm going...

HS: ...what is called a simple loaded question. Yes?

GK: I feel like my story is, as I have it now, I'm up to the point where you've made the *Anthology of American Folk Music*. I want you to tell me approximately how long it was before you started working on—that was in the fifties?

HS: 1952.

GK: You didn't do the Kiowa record until 1964?

HS: Yes.

GK: Tell me briefly, start filling in the gaps for me—tell me after you made that anthology. Were you spending most of your time painting at that stage? Did you make any other records?

HS: Well, I had such arguments with Miss Distler that after the *Anthology of American Folk Songs* came out...because I wanted...

GK: A fourth volume.

HS: Well, and certain other things. She wasn't able to understand, although Pete Seeger was. He said that this is what you should have called it—the volume is called "Social Music." At the present time I reject that entire approach to music. Things that happened more than thirty years ago, or something about the statute of limitations. I can no longer be held responsible for having put that thing together in the way it was put together. So for a long time I didn't contact Mr. Asch.

GK: Right.

HS: I didn't realize that he owed me royalties, but he got in touch with me through somebody else after a year or two, because I stomped out of the office in a huff.

GK: Right.

HS: There are many things that I can't discuss with you.

GK: The things I need to know are not controversial. All I want to know is what you did and when. Right now that's all I want to know.

HS: What I did and when? That's pretty controversial.

GK: I want...

HS: I don't know. I know I was drunk a lot.

GK: When did you make the *Sacred Harp* album?

HS: Oh, that's...

GK: Was that after the Kiowa?

HS: No, those are all reissues of earlier records. Mr. Asch had dubbed them at the time that the *Anthology of American Folk Songs* was made.

GK: So those are records you had in your collection.

HS: Yeah.

GK: You didn't record them?

HS: No, I didn't record those.

GK: Okay.

HS: It's like all the earlier records of that sort. But I haven't written up the notes for it. I mean, it's one of those things that I collected money from Mr. Asch for, gave him the tapes, but not the notes. Now if he would proceed on it like he did with the Kiowa album and get me test pressings of the things—he has several albums. I can't get around to this until after I have finished my drawings for this book, [and] finished my movie.

GK: Right.

HS: Then, I'll get back to Mr. Asch. You understand we're not buddy-buddies.

GK: Right, right.

HS: On the phone you say to me, "Moe Asch has invited me to dinner at his house. What do you think of that?" I thought, "Oh, dear, what *do* I think of that? What will they talk about?" But Mr. Asch and I collect records and things, too. You know they're fun to have around, even if there's too many to listen to.

GK: The *Sacred Harp* record, so he put one out? He put one out recently, and he's got more, is that right?

HS: He put one out recently?

GK: I'm asking you.

HS: Well, I don't keep up with his actions!

GK: All right, so it has not come out that you know of.

HS: No.

GK: All right.

HS: All the transcriptions of the songs have been made. The notes are elaborate, do you understand? They're philosophical statements regarding the science of musicology.

GK: All right.

HS: I mean, it's not just a bunch of records, brought out to get some money. To produce a Folkways album—anybody that makes one spends thousands of dollars to make it and is given hundreds of dollars in exchange. It's something like the bank's promise on the radio...

GK: It's a fair deal.

HS: ...that if you come into the bank and deposit one million dollars they will give you a brand new ten dollar bill.

GK: For the enrichment of your life and making these records, I think.

HS: Yeah, you're beginning to get the idea, you see.

GK: Moe is training me.

HS: And then you're making records. You should have a little bit better equipment. If I'd known you were going to get here I would have probably rented—I could have got a Nagra or something, and a better microphone, because these records of our conversations, they're only in order to immortalize you after your unfortunate early death. They should be in a higher fidelity and in stereo, you know—you on one mic and me on another mic, so you can cut one of us. If you don't want to hear what you have to say, they could just...

GK: So they could put in incriminating questions instead.

HS: Yeah, some kind of word processor.

GK: Right. All right. Now, let me ask you—so that explains the Sacred Harp. You made a record of the Chopi from Mozambique? [Folkways 4318, 1982].

HS: No, no. Those were made by a friend of Ron Hollis'.

GK: Ron Hollis. Okay. So he made the record.

HS: It's three records.

GK: What is your relationship to that project?

HS: Well, I've always considered the man to be—to consider himself more civilized than the Africans, although he has an elaborate British-Canadian way of explaining that away.

GK: Okay. But this guy is a friend of yours? He's contemporary in other words.

HS: I don't know. I'll have to speak to my lawyer. I don't know. I got a card from him a few weeks ago.

GK: No, I just want to know that he's alive. That's what I'm asking.

HS: Well, I don't know whether he's alive. I mean, it's all—see, here's a card from him from Zimbabwe. I can't quite make out the date.

GK: January 6th?

HS: Where he says he'll be in New York soon. He's in...[reads] "Greetings. I'm here for a few weeks to research two films—one on the Prime Minister Robert [Mugabe]" okay, "and the other on Zimbabwe and music, traditional and pop. I'll be visiting you soon."

GK: Really? I'd love to speak to him when he comes in.

HS: Yeah. But he's always...

GK: Is there an address I can write to him? Do you have an address?

HS: Well, I don't know. Somewhere I have an address. He's head of the film department in Mozambique or something. I have no idea what he's up to.

GK: I don't need to know what he's up to. I want his address so I can write, so that when he comes to New York I can arrange to speak to him.

HS: Sure. I'll be glad to do that. Because you might be able to write some kind of an article for one of the magazines.

GK: If he made a record for Folkways I want to talk to him.

HS: He made three.

GK: Three separate records?

HS: Three separate records.

GK: From Mozambique?

HS: Yeah. One of them Alan Lomax said was the best record that Folkways had ever brought out. I don't keep them around because his attitude is too subservient. Like he, you know, he says he would—he wouldn't have made the records if it hadn't been for my stimulation. You understand that I send people all over world to make records in places that I haven't been able to visit. Like Skye Island, that island that's sinking out of sight, Formosa, Taiwan, whatever.

GK: So, he's just a friend of yours? You didn't do the notes?

HS: I'm probably one of the few people that he was able to speak to intelligently regarding the subject. I have a lot of Chopian music. I know a great number of young people who are interested in these subjects, and I consider that they will be the ones that will form the future. Naturally, I'm interested in what's going to happen to the world. How I got here and how to get out of it gracefully.

GK: Did you do any recording for Folkways between the *Anthology of Folk Music*?

HS: Nothing.

GK: And the Kiowa?

HS: No, I didn't.

GK: Okay.

HS: Oh, other stuff, sure, but I don't know. I mean, incidentally, I can't imagine what was done for Folkways. I mean, Harmonica Slim, some guys that had his name written on the tapes, copies of the tapes, here's—if I ever think it's a convenient place—if you lead a transient life, like a tramp on the street like I do, Folkways is a good place to leave your records. They're always safe, because he's always moving and you can't find him. Or else he's in the hospital. Now, okay, next question. You only have forty-five minutes.

GK: I know.

HS: These records of Harmonica Slim, Slim Parsons, are extremely long, but they're not issued. Scarcely anything I do for Mr.

Asch ever gets issued. So those are outstanding records where he's playing the harmonica or playing the piano and singing. And Bre'r Rabbit stories and all that sort of thing.

GK: Are there any other records that you've recorded for them that were issued, other than the Kiowa?

HS: No.

GK: Just those two sets. The three box sets that's called...

HS: Two, three, four, five, six. That's nine records.

GK: Right, okay. Nine disks.

HS: And then each one has two sides, which makes sixteen.

GK: Right. I'm glad I'm getting this on tape.

HS: Which is four times four. And—yeah, the Qabalistic parts can be looked at later.

GK: All right.

HS: Would you like me to read your fortune?

GK: Later.

HS: It's bad.

GK: Now, talk to me a little bit about...

HS: It's bad.

GK: ...about your painting. First of all, in one of these interviews which took place a while ago, you said you've had slides of your paintings. Were they destroyed, a lot of your paintings?

HS: Well, most of them are, but I assume that life in the universe will continue to the point that anything can be recreated. It's only an illusion anyhow. There isn't anything here except some kind of weak magnetic field.

GK: Well, I'm glad you don't feel possessive about these things. I still would like to know whether you made a lot of paintings that no longer exist. Were they destroyed in a fire, or did you destroy them?

HS: Well, I don't know. Some I tore up. The one that was there the first time you were here, I tore it, tore it into several pieces and jumped up and down on it. I don't know what happens to them. I mean, it doesn't make any difference. It's like what happens to you. I only had hoped you had driven, so that there might be a dreadful

wreck on the highway and it would start a beautiful soap foam, which is Taiwanese for folk songs. I wonder what Scott has to say in his letter, because he's making records for Mr. Asch, too, I think.

GK: So now, your paintings, would you mind talking a little bit about your paintings?

HS: Yeah, I'd object to that.

GK: All right, how about your hermetic philosophy, which you said you wanted to be sure that I did justice to?

HS: You only have forty-five minutes, and you're writing a book on Mr. Asch. Now ask me embarrassing questions about him.

GK: But I want five minutes of hermetic philosophy.

HS: Five minutes of hermetic philosophy? Well, I suppose it's based on the supposed existence of Hermes and, you know, Thrice Greatest Hermes, and a body of literature that is from about 600 B.C. It's not nearly as early as the writers would claim, and has to do with the relation of the macrocosm and the microcosm. It's like congruent with a great number of other philosophies of the same period. Like from about three thousand to one thousand years ago or something—that human consciousness in relation to—no, I take that back. It treats the nature of perception. But it survives a longer time than any of the other religions of that period. It sort of survives up into the 1700s, in a roundabout fashion. Okay, that's enough on that. But most recently, during the Elizabethan period I'd say, during the 1600s, was the last outburst of that sort of stuff. Sort of a connecting thread in history.

GK: Forgive my ignorance, but does this hermetic philosophy have anything to do with isolationism or isolating oneself?

HS: I suppose that all forms of discipline have something to do with isolation.

GK: It's based on Hermes? It has nothing to do with hermetics? It comes from Hermes? It has nothing to do with being a hermit?

HS: Well, I think that maybe they have something to do with each other.

GK: Oh, yeah? Okay.

HS: Yeah, I think it's like when the thing is hermetically sealed, it's like isolated, so that I would say that there was—I don't have the Oxford English Dictionary at hand.

GK: Getting back to the recordings. Now, you said the Fugs were a group that you knew. You brought them to Moe. Are there any other groups like that, that you weren't involved in recording, necessarily, but whom you brought to Moe? Did you introduce Moe to Allen Ginsberg?

HS: Well, he already had recordings of Allen Ginsberg, but the ones that he issued were ones that were recordings that I made that Ann Charters edited. I just hope that she took the right ones out. Those were recorded by me. They both tried to be very decent about it, but I'm very cranky and I don't forgive people who do me wrong. I see that they go away to a bad place and they don't come back.

GK: All right.

HS: You sure? I didn't break the machine when I dropped it?

GK: Yeah, I'm positive. Try as you may, it still takes a licking and keeps on ticking, as John Cameron Swayze would say. So there are Allen Ginsberg recordings you put out that you made. Now, are there any other records like that?

HS: No. There should be. For example, I recorded Gregory Corso reading his entire book *Gasoline*, which I wish would be brought out. Mr. Asch has always been generous in dealing with me but I don't know who's taking advantage of who. We both assume the other one is taking advantage of the other one.

I would be lacking in self-respect if I said that the *Anthology of American Folk Song* had anything less than a very powerful influence on what happened later. Nonetheless, that was a long time ago, and I don't see him that much. I mean, I'm not very well mentally, not exactly like in perfect mental-spiritual health, and it's hard visiting you.

GK: Right.

HS: Okay, is that half a side? How far did it go?

* * *

HS: Now my friend, Mr. Gary Kenton, will now slip another thing in and ask a supposedly innocent question. But little does he know that I know that he knows that I know that he knows that I know. So what is your next question? I don't want to have any discussion regarding the relationship between art and music, because those things are covered well by Goethe, for example, and more recently by Wittgenstein, and I'm not in a position to speak of them. I also have no idea of what time it is in regards to years. So I can't pinpoint things. Although I have extensive files, and if an assistant would show up that would help me move, throw out dirty shirts and things, it would be possible to actually find papers that cover these various periods. I've saved them all, you know.

GK: Right.

HS: But I'm trying to sell myself into slavery. And anybody that wants to can buy me, see, and get all my productions from now on, plus everything that I have at the present time. Okay, next question.

GK: Have you made money from your films?

HS: Yes, I've made money. It depends how much you mean by "making money."

GK: Is that how you've supported yourself, from your films?

HS: No, no, no. Basically by blackmail and being the drug king of area code 516. I don't know how I've supported myself. It's one of the things that gives me a belief in some creative energy beyond that of human hands, is the fact that up to this point I've had very good luck. There have been many times when I have tried suicide or something like that, but have always failed.

GK: That probably has nothing to do with luck. Nor the fact that you've managed to survive has to do with...

HS: Bad luck, yes.

GK: Well, it has to do with who you are and the work you've done.

HS: I keep trying to inspire people but whether this compensates for my sins, I don't know.

GK: Well, I'm not going to judge that. No one can.

HS: Yes, they can.

GK: Aside from Jonas Mekas, and I think you mentioned Geldzahler, are there any other people who we should mention as people who have been friends of yours and also helped you?

HS: One of the most helpful people at a time when I was living on fifteen dollars a week—I had a room for a dollar a day, and I cooked all my own food—it was just like eggs and porridge, and that was a dollar a day—Alice Bouvier, who was John Jacob Astor's daughter, her mother.

GK: Daughter of whom?

HS: John Jacob Astor, and Lady Teasdale, who was Mrs. Astor at the point that the Titanic was sunk. And she survived, she was pregnant with Mrs. Bouvier.

GK: Wow.

HS: Now she was one of the first people that I met when I would be desperately in need of ten dollars.

GK: Approximately when was this? '50s, '60s?

HS: '50s, of course.

GK: Well, I'm asking.

HS: Oh, I can tell you things that happened during the '20s. I have a good memory. I know you're not interested in the Depression, or anything like that.

GK: No, I'm interested in this Alice Bouvier.

HS: Well, Mrs. Bouvier was the type that—the former Alice Astor said that I would—I was hoping that she had ten dollars. I said, "I wonder if I can ask you at this time to give me," and she said, "I don't have anything on me at all except—I don't know, here's two hundred dollars. Will that be of any help?" I've met many, many generous people. See, people try to help me. Many of them are living and many of them are government officials of one sort or another, and I don't like to name them, as I said, before I speak to my lawyer. I can't be as open with you as I was about Mr. Asch. I've been warned that it might get me into trouble with...

GK: All right.

HS: ...my mother.

GK: I know of a woman who was a friend of yours who died not too long ago. Isabella Gardner?

HS: Yes, Isabella Stewart Gardner.

GK: Now, she lived in the Chelsea for many years?

HS: Yeah, yes, she lived there, of course.

GK: So.

HS: That's Rosie's mother.

GK: Ah, okay. I didn't realize that.

HS: Yeah, at one point Isabella was married to—although she died in the Gramercy Park Hotel, where Mr. Jacques Stern was living at the time. It was on the fourth of July that she had her heart attack, which was the anniversary of the day that Rosie went insane. She was looking at television. Boy, all I hear is everybody's after that money. I am astounded.

GK: Which money?

HS: That.

GK: What? Isabella Gardner? No, wait.

HS: Oh, I don't know which. I mean, what do you mean, which money? Money is money.

GK: I thought you were talking about specific...

HS: There's a song, "If you've got the money, honey, I've got the time."

GK: Now, Isabella. It's funny. She's got the same name, almost, as the woman who ran the museum in Boston.

HS: Mrs. Jack Gardner didn't exactly run the museum. She had her home turned into a museum.

GK: Was that Jack Gardner?

HS: Well, that was her husband's name.

GK: So she was Rosie's and Anika's mother?

HS: There's all kinds of Gardners. Well, now, Rosie always called Anika her sister, but you know how people are when they belong to some kind of voodoo club. They're everybody's sister and brother. I mean, you meet people who talk about their brothers—oh, well, then they're obviously sisters. It's creepy, isn't it? I made many films of Rosie. She's one of the main characters in my Kurt Weill-Bertolt Brecht film, *Number 18*.

GK: *Mahagonny*?

HS: Yeah.

GK: You said that she went insane, Rosie?

HS: Yes.

GK: Is she still alive?

HS: As far as I know, in some place called the Institute for Living, or something, in Connecticut, but I understand that—I received letters from her for a long time, but not since I moved here. I've only got one letter from her, which is a Christmas card, because I didn't want my mail forwarded here. There are certain things that you don't know that I shouldn't—that I cannot tell you until you're even more corrupt. In other words, next week. You're unable to ask any questions regarding Rosie and Isabella Stewart Gardner and Jacques Stern and the Chelsea Hotel and anything like that. It's only when it impinges on people I feel are of a friendly nature, like Mr. Asch for example, who may fume and fury, but is relatively innocent. If things go completely wrong, he locks himself in his office and cries. He doesn't throw things at you.

GK: Right. He'll yell. He'll yell for a while. How long were you in Oklahoma with the Kiowa?

HS: Oh, I really don't know. Although, as I say, if I get an assistant to help me unpack my luggage and stuff.

GK: Were you there for a period of months, or a year?

HS: Oh, around a year, I suppose. It all depends on what you mean by "were you there?" I mean what part of me was there when I went there? Was the back of my neck there? I can't remember any particular situation overall in which the back of my neck stood out as a particularly prominent thing. So did it go or didn't it go? It's a complicated question involving philosophical problems regarding when you go somewhere, what part of you goes? I don't know whether you felt your heel today, but being as there was no necessity for it, and physical law seems to operate on the basis of necessity. I'm more interested in things at this moment like Yeats—William Butler Yeats and Charles Darwin, than I am in Shakespeare and Frances Yates. Okay. Do you have any further questions?



Photo by Hy Hirsh, 1952 © Robert Johnson

P. Adams Sitney—NYC

HS: The dating of my films is difficult because I had made the first one, or part of that, in 1939. It was about twenty-five years ago, although it says forty years in the Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue, because at different times I have posed as different ages.

PS: When were you born?

HS: I never give that information out. I would like to say that I'm the Czar of Russia. My mother always claimed to be Anastasia. That's how I got Mr. R. interested in these things. This interview has to be severely cut down. Like, no names, Mr. R., you know, or something.

I had drawn on film for quite a while, but exactly which one is *Number 1* I don't know. It was made sometime between 1939 and, I would say, 1942 at the latest. Later, I was very disappointed to find out that Len Lye had done it. Naturally, I was horrified when either Dick Foster or Frank Stauffacher showed up with a book one day and told me that not only had Len made hand-painted films, but he had done 16mm ones. Then later somebody in San Francisco, whose name I forget (he was the Harley-Davidson agent), got like stimulated by me and made 8mm hand-painted films.

Number 1 was made by taking impressions of various things, like cutting up erasers or the lid of a Higgins Ink bottle. That's where I

derived all the circular shapes. There's a kind of cork on the top of it. I dipped it in the ink and squashed it down on the film; then later, I went over the thing with a crow-quill pen. However, the colors aren't too good in that film. I can't remember how long it took to make it, because I'd made a number of others. I had a considerable number of films that have not been printed at all. Undoubtedly less than half of my stuff is in my possession now.

PS: Were the early films made on 16mm?

HS: No, on 35mm. After I made *Number 1*, I met the Whitney brothers through Frank Stauffacher and Dick Foster. Foster was the one who had really started the Art in Cinema Society, because he had been in New York and had met filmmakers there. But later he and Stauffacher fell out, so I took over Foster's position. They sent me down to Los Angeles to look for films. That's when I met Kenneth Anger, who sort of remembered me when he was up here last month. It must have been 1944, maybe, when I made that trip.

PS: He made *Fireworks* in 1947.

HS: 1947? He definitely remembered me when I brought up the situation during which our meeting occurred. How old was he at that time?

PS: About seventeen.

HS: Everybody was very embarrassed at his films at that point. It was a horrible thing! He was embarrassed, I was embarrassed. I went to his house, and he was afraid his mother was going to find out that I was there. She was upstairs. He looks today almost identical to the way he looked then. That's the amazing thing! It was a small bungalow-type place. I didn't realize the artistic quality of *Fireworks* until seeing it this year; then it seemed like some kind of homosexual exercise. When Kenneth sat down in something like a golden chair from Versailles of his mother's, the chair's leg fell off. He was very embarrassed: "My mother might hear me." Then, in order to get the leg back on the chair, he raised the venetian blind and the cord broke, and the thing fell all over the floor. However, I did manage to get the film for the Art in Cinema Society, which I think was its first large showing. The auditorium of the San Francisco

Museum of Art seated at least, I suppose, three hundred people. He came up to the showing and embarrassed everyone. After the clapping at the end of the film, I thought he was putting his hands up like a prize fighter. But when he was here a month or so ago, he explained that that was a sign having something to do with the Aleister Crowley cult—I forget what—perhaps Shu holding up the sky.

I had been going to the University of Washington studying anthropology. I was a teaching assistant there, occasionally. (I still love Drs. Gunther and Jacobs.) I was never a good student, at all. I led a very isolated youth. My father had run away from home at an early age to become a cowboy. I think that at that time his grandfather was the governor of Illinois. They were a wealthy family. My great-grandfather, General John Corson Smith, was aide-de-camp to General Grant during the later Civil War. My mother came from Sioux City, Iowa, but my grandmother had had a school that was supported by the Czarina of Russia in Sitka, Alaska, although she moved around. The Czarina still supported those operations for years, and that's what led to my mother's being Anastasia. My father destroyed every single shred of information on her when she died. I never saw him again. The last time that I saw my father, I was like a heroin addict. I might have been sixteen or seventeen. I left on the bus for San Francisco after the funeral. I had to get back to get ahold of the connection. My father was crying.

What I started to say was that they lived in separate houses. My grandfather came to Washington and founded the Pacific American Fisheries with his brother, which is the largest salmon canning combine in the world. They killed off all the salmon in Washington. They still have twenty-some canneries in Alaska. They fished everything else out of British Columbia and Washington years ago. This doesn't have much to do with my films. It's all true. My father may still be alive. I haven't contacted him for years, although he tried to find me by various means. He found out that my films were being shown at the Art in Cinema Society, and tried to discover where I was. He finally did find out where I was, and I sent him one

of those *Tree of Life* drawings. I never did hear from him again. He was evidently very smart; he had taught me about alchemy. He was interested in that sort of thing. On about my twelfth birthday he gave me a whole blacksmith's shop. (They were stuck with various canneries that had been built up during the First World War. The whole thing over-expanded.) Most of my childhood was spent in a fairly elaborate place in Anacortes, Washington. There was nobody there at that time except my father, who was something of a ne'er-do-well. My great-grandfather must have been pretty interesting. At one point, he said, "I'm leaving for a five-year tour of Tibet." After the Civil War, the Masons split into two groups. One of them was led by Albert Pike, who wrote *Morals and Dogma of the Scottish Rite*. The other one, the Knights Templar, were refounded by my great-grandfather. Any time that the Masons have a parade on Fifth Avenue, they always have a float that shows my great-grandfather founding this thing. He traveled all over the world and initiated people like the King of Hawaii and King Edward the Seventh into that business. When I was a child, there were a great number of books on occultism and alchemy always in the basement.

Like I say, my father gave me a blacksmith shop when I was maybe twelve. He told me I should convert lead into gold. He had me build all these things, like models of the first Bell telephone, the original electric light bulb, and perform all sorts of historical experiments. I once discovered in the attic of our house all those illuminated documents with hands with eyes in them, all kinds of Masonic deals that belonged to my grandfather. My father said I shouldn't have seen them, and he burned them up immediately. That was my background for my interest in metaphysics and so forth. My mother described mainly events from when she was working in the school in Alaska my grandmother had run. For example, one day she hadn't been able to get into the place where she was living. It was so cold her hands started to freeze, and she was unable to unlock the door. She went out into the woods, where she saw all the animals performing ceremonies. She told me many times about that, because it must have been a wonderful thing. That was

somewhere on the Yukon River. Hundreds had gathered together and were leaping over each other by moonlight. They were running around in little circles in different places. Of course, it all could be explained in terms of biomass, or what is that thing called? There is some way that the animals have certain ranges and interrelate with one another. It was evidently some special thing. The authority on these things, Tinbergen, points out that animals do absolutely every single thing that humans do except make fire.

Very early, my parents got me interested in projecting things. The first projections that I made were from the lamps of a flashlight. In those days, flashlights had lenses on the front of them. That couldn't have been much later than in 1928.

What I really started to say was that due to the vast amount of buildings and things that had no use after there were no more salmon in the Fraser or the Columbia, my parents lived in separate houses from the time I was about ten until I left home at the age of eighteen. They had communication between their houses by ringing bells. They'd meet for dinner. My father wanted to play the piano and the guitar. He was interested also in drawings and things. He was the one who showed me how to make that *Tree of Life* geometrically. I mostly lived with my mother. I performed what might be considered sexual acts with her until I was eighteen or nineteen maybe. No actual insertion or anything, but I would always get up in the morning and get in bed with her, because she had a long story she would tell me about someone named Eaky-Peaky. She was a really good storyteller. My posture is derived from trying to be exactly her height, for she was shorter. I think that the first time she went to Alaska must have been kind of strange, because it was right after or during the Gold Rush. Both my parents were there at that time. There were various people on this boat going to the Gold Rush. One of them, for example, was suffering from withdrawal from morphine and thought she had worms under her flesh. She was lying there saying, "The worms! the worms!" The other was some kind of whore who was hanging her tits out of the porthole and saying,

"Come on, boys, milkshake, five cents a shake." I don't know how my father got there. They somehow met there. They met somehow.

So anyhow, the first projections that I made were negatives that my mother and father had taken in Alaska. I had thousands of those, enormous masses of this stuff. I can remember the amazement that I felt when I took the lens of the flashlight and was able to see one of the snow scenes on the walls of the hall.

My mother evidently had a number of boyfriends, as my father was never there. He was always in Alaska doing something. She would park me in movies, most of which I can't remember. They were all silent movies. That's what got me interested in them. Sure, she was off doing something else, maybe not with boyfriends. I did meet a few of them. That's how I met Aleister Crowley. Probably he's my father, although I don't want to say that. There's a question as to whether he is or Robert James Smith is. She had fallen in love with Crowley when he was in this country in about 1918, while he was living on some islands in Puget Sound north of Seattle. Then he showed up a few more times, probably—I don't know when they were—in 1927 or sometime—that can be determined from books of his travels. I can remember meeting him at least once. He showed me a clam neck hanging off a cliff. He had a black turtle-neck sweater on. He was not any kind of sissified character like they say. He was a really handsome, muscular person. My mother would sneak off to see him. He was there twice, as far as I can remember. She met him when he was running naked down the beach in 1918.

She would leave me in a theater. I saw some good films there, which I wish it were possible to locate again. I saw one, for example, which was pretty good, in which bad children put caps into the spaghetti at a fancy Italian dinner. (That was one of the first sound films that I ever saw.) When the people chewed their spaghetti there was a BAAAKH. That was about all that was on the soundtrack. The mouth would fly open, and false teeth would go across the dinner table, and so forth. They consistently took me to see Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. I can remember being horrified when Keaton [*The General*] gets caught in the bear trap, though my parents

thought that was so funny. I was never able to understand why it was funny, but they kept taking me back to it day after day. Mainly I liked serials. I didn't particularly like Charlie Chaplin or Buster Keaton. Of course, I appreciate them now.

I was still going to school, which was an interesting school. What was that called? The Western Washington School of Education. The head of it later got busted for Communism. I liked it because they had a glass beehive in the middle of the classroom that had a chute running out through the window so we could study the bees at work. It was an unpleasant place, because they kept accusing me of stealing things like money. On the day that Admiral Byrd was visiting, somebody said Miss Rich, who was my principal, was going to take us to see Admiral Byrd, and I said, "Oh, kick Miss Rich in the pants." It was horrible, because I said this to the person next to me, and the person next to me said it to the person next to him, "Harry said, 'Kick Miss Rich in the pants.'" And he said it to the next one. I saw this thing go around, back and forth across the room. It finally got to the teacher, so naturally, I was kept home when everybody else went to see Admiral Byrd; although strangely enough, I met him in a Mannings later that day.

I saw all those Fu Manchu movies; they were some of my favorites. There was also some serial that had a great big spider about the size of this room, which would be chasing Pearl White down through tunnels. That thing scared the shit out of me, but I probably had erections during it, it was so terrifying. I was very interested in spiders at about the age of five. I discovered a lot of them in the Columbine vines. Also, I remember meeting my grandfather (my mother's father), who was also pretty interesting because he had followed a particular friend of his—he had been born in Kentucky, I don't know where, some place like that—and followed the Union troops north after the Civil War. I remember he and his friend had long white beards with yellow streaks down the front of them. I had thought that egg had run down the middle of their beards.

This is the college education that I got. I was never able to pass the entrance examination in English, despite the fact that I should

have a Ph.D. at this point, on all other bases but that. I just could not diagram sentences. I was sort of an instructor at one point at the University of California. I went to the University of Washington first. I was never too well-liked there. The war had ended, and here was all this anti-Communism. What they call witch hunting was going on, and my favorite teacher was—you see, I got connected with the World Friends Service Committee at that point. I began working with the Japanese that were being kicked off the West Coast. The day after Pearl Harbor, all the Japanese were arrested and sent to camps in some horrible desert. I forget where that was. They sure came back in condition! We finally got one Japanese back to Seattle who was a midget and wore a monocle—a girl, who was going to deliver a lecture in some church. I forget what that thing was called—the Fellowship of Reconciliation, that was it. I barely escaped the Communist plots, I think. It was pretty funny. We rented this church for her to give the lecture in, and nobody came. Not one person. There I'm stuck with this girl that is completely confused. I was also involved with a lot of Jewish refugees that were going to the University of Washington then, ranting about people being thrown into incinerators and so forth in concentration camps. It was an interesting period. I wish they'd have another war. I liked it.

There's confusion in the notes for the Catalogue [Film-makers Cooperative No.3, 1965], because I tend to glamorize, saying that I did such and such at a much earlier age than I did it. The reason I moved to Berkeley from—how did that happen? Anyway, I went to Berkeley on some little trip from Seattle with someone named Kenneth. I forget what his last name was. I'd met him in a bookstore. He said, "I'm leaving for Berkeley. Do you want to go?" So I went to Berkeley. This was supposed to be for over the weekend. However, while I was there I ran into someone named Griff B[orgeson]. He turned me on to marijuana. So naturally, when I got back to the University of Washington, where I was about to become a teaching assistant, it was impossible to stay there after having smoked pot. The stuff that is given in the Catalogue that was used

on different films is slightly inaccurate. I've never experienced the real heroin addiction thing. In the place where I lived, the Fillmore district of San Francisco, called Jackson's Nook, two people died. I mean, there was a number of people staggering out into the back yard and dropping dead. When my mother died, there were a lot of guns around the house, because they'd always had them while they were in Alaska, both my mother and father. I took all that stuff back with me. It led to a rather exciting life in San Francisco at that point. My mother was dying in the hospital of what Ronald J. once called "terminal diarrhea." She died the day after I left. I was like a heroin addict at that point. The symptoms were not very serious, though. I was not lying on the floor frothing at the mouth. I had a stomach-ache and a runny nose and that sort of thing.

I was mainly a painter. The films are minor accessories to my paintings. It just happened that I had the films with me when everything else was destroyed. My paintings were infinitely better than my films, because much more time was spent on them. I can show you slides of them. I don't have any slides that were made since about 1950. That's a painting that was made of the score for one of the films that were shown. That's like the scenario for the last movement of one of those color films.

My first film was made by imprinting of the cork off an ink bottle and all that sort of thing, as I said before. The second one was made with Come-Clean gum dots, automatic adhesive dots that Dick Foster got for me. It's like a paper dot with gum on the back. The film was painted over with a brush to make it wet, then with a mouth-type spray gun, dye was sprayed onto the film. When that dried the whole film was greased with Vaseline. Of course, this was in short sections—maybe six-foot-long sections—anyway, they would be tacked down. With a pair of tweezers, the dots were pulled off. That's where those colored balls drop and that sort of stuff. Being as it was pulled off, it was naturally dry where the dot had been and that part which had been colored was protected by the Vaseline coating at this point. Then color was sprayed into where the dot had been. After that dried, the whole film was cleaned with carbon tetrachloride.

The next one was made by putting masking tape onto the film and slitting the tape lightly with a razor blade and a ruler, and then picking off all those little squares that are revolving around. I worked off and on on that film for about five years pretty consistently. I worked on it every day at least. I may have abandoned it at one point for three months, or six months at the most.

Mrs. S., who owned the house in Berkeley, gave me a room in exchange for mowing the lawn and trimming the ivy. I had developed a theory that the ideal diet was a mixture of butter and sugar—a pound of sugar and a pound of butter mixed together. I became so weak, though, that I was unable to get out of bed for a long time. Except some girl, Panthia L., would come up some mornings and scramble an egg and give it to me. Or I'd go down to the supermarket and steal avocados, butter, and sugar.

PS: Were the early abstract films at all influenced by your childhood interest in the occult?

HS: Sort of. But mainly by looking in the water. I lived a kind of isolated childhood. I said my parents were living in different houses and would only meet at dinner time. They'd set up this fancy five-story art school, at which there were really only two students—sometimes there were four students. With Mrs. Williams, I studied at least from maybe 1932 to 1942. I must have studied with her for ten years. She gave lessons two or three times a week during that period, which consisted of drawing things. She'd lay out a cylinder or a ball or an egg-shaped thing, which we were supposed to draw on a piece of paper and then lay a piece of glass over that and trace the drawing with a grease pencil, then hold it up and see if it looked exactly the same.

Number 1 took a very long time, either a day or a week. Then *Number 2*, which was much longer than the form it is in now. It was actually at least half an hour long. It was cut down to match a recording by Dizzy Gillespie, which I believe is called "Guarachi Guaro." It took maybe a year to make. Then on the next one I worked on about five years, then I gave up that particular style. There were maybe eight years of it. I developed certain really complicated

hand-painting techniques, of which I made only short versions. For example, painting the whole film a certain color and then smearing Vaseline on it, and then taking a stylus and scraping designs off. It's possible to get a lot of spirals and curvilinear designs—which I was never able to do by cutting off the masking tape—then spraying bleach into the place where the groove was. I made short samples of that sort of material. As I say, less than half of all that stuff is in my possession at this point. I also made alternate versions of a great number of scenes. Sometimes, in order to demonstrate how it was done, I made up special reels that partially had the masking tape still left on, and partially the first—anyway, there are thousands of feet that were never printed, and several entire very long films. Many of those films are missing totally. I never edited at all, except to cut them down—except that second one, which shows the balls falling. Like I say, it was at least twelve hundred feet long originally. It was then cut down to a hundred feet to make it match "Guarachi Guaro."

What Jonas Mekas calls "The Magic Feature" [*Number 12*] was originally about six hours long, and then it was edited down, first to a two-hour version, and then down to a one-hour version. There was also an enormous amount of material made for that picture. None of the really good material that was constructed for that film was ever photographed. There was a Noah's Ark scene with really fantastic animals. I started out with the poorer stuff. The really good things were supposed to be toward the end of the film, but being as the end of the film was never made.

On that *Oz* film, that expensive one, of course, I had quite a few people working, so that all kinds of special cut outs were made that were never photographed. I mean really wonderful ones were made! One cut out might take someone two months to make. They were very elaborate stencils and so forth. All of my later films were never quite completed. Most of the material was never shot, because the film[ing] dragged on too long.

Those two optically printed films were made for the Guggenheim Foundation. The three-dimensional one was made from the same batch of stencils as the color one. First, I got a camera from Frank

Stauffacher, which is when those two films were made. The first is called *Circular Tensions* [Number 5]. I forget what the other one is called. The black-and-white one [Number 4] precedes that.

PS: The black-and-white film [Number 4] begins with a shot of...

HS: ...a painting. It is a painting of a tune by Dizzy Gillespie called "Manteca." Each stroke in that painting represents a certain note on the recording. If I had the record, I could project the painting as a slide and point to a certain thing. This is the main theme in there, which is a-doot-doot-doot, doot-doot-dootadootdoot—those curved lines up there. See, ta-doot-doot-doot-doot-dootaloot-dootaloot, and so forth. Each note is on there. The most complex one of these is this one, one of Charlie Parker's records. I don't remember the name of it. That's a really complex painting. That took five years. Just like I gave up making films after that last hand-drawn one took a number of years, I gave up painting after that took a number of years to make. It was just too exhausting. There's a dot for each note and the phrases that the notes consist of are colored in a certain way or made in a certain path. The last paintings that I made were realistic things connected with the Tower of Babel. There was an extraordinary one of the control room of the Tower of Babel, which was built in a railway car leaving it. That painting was derived from a scene in Buster Keaton's film *The General*, where he chops out the end of the box car. A special film was projected onto the painting so that all the machinery operates.

In a number of cases I've made special screens to project films on. All those so-called early abstract films had special painted screens for them. They were made of dots and lines. All those things disappeared.

When I went to Oklahoma last year [1964], I decided to devote my attention to the Indians. I really was honored to be able to record those things from the Indians. I decided to devote the rest of my life to that one thing. It was an unusual opportunity, because the Kiowa Indians are extremely conservative. They hadn't really been studied very much. Through various reasons, I got involved with them, so that they told me all their myths and everything. It seemed better to

devote the conclusion to that. That's why I'm living in this hotel room. Despite the fact that I can't afford the hotel room—it's fifty dollars a week—I'm more or less able to spend my time doing that one thing. It is a very elaborate series of records, you know. We're devoting far too much time to accessory subjects. Naturally, I sort of goof on everything I'm doing.

PS: I'm very puzzled by your fascination to visualize music.

HS: That's an interesting question, isn't it? I don't know. When I was a child, somebody came to school one day and said they'd been to an Indian dance, and they saw somebody swinging a skull on the end of a string, so that I thought, "Hmm, I have to see this." I went to that. Then I fell in with the Salish around Puget Sound for a long time. I sometimes spent three or four months with them during summer vacation, or sometimes in the winter, while I was going to high school or junior high school. It all started in grade school. In an effort to write down dances, I developed certain techniques of transcription. Then I got interested in the designs in relation to the music. That's where it started from. Of course! It was an attempt to write down the unknown Indian life. I made a large number of recordings of that, which are also unfortunately lost. I took portable equipment all over that place long before anyone else did and recorded whole long ceremonies sometimes lasting several days. Diagramming the pictures was so interesting that I then started to be interested in music in relation to existence. After that I met Griff B., went to Berkeley, and started smoking marijuana, naturally little colored balls appeared whenever we played Bessie Smith and so forth—whatever it was I was listening to at that time. I had a really great illumination the first time I heard Dizzy Gillespie play. I had gone there very high, and I literally saw all kinds of colored flashes. It was at that point that I realized music could be put to my films. My films had been made before then, but I had always shown them silently. I had been interested in Jungian psychiatry when I was in junior high school. I found some books by Jung in the Bellingham Library. The business about mandalas and so forth got

me involved. I would like to say I'm not very interested in Jung anymore. It seems very crude now.

Incidentally, this whole thing can probably be printed—if you want to print it for me—like some kind of poem. In that way, this constant shifting back and forth can be eliminated.

Later I borrowed a camera from Hy Hirsh. He had a pretty good camera, a Bell and Howell model 70-something, and had seen my films. The San Francisco Museum showed that one of the grille works [*Number 7*] that precedes *Circular Tensions*, and he came up and spoke. That's when I asked for a camera. I've never owned a camera. I've usually just borrowed one, then pawned it. That's always an embarrassing scene, trying to explain to the person where his or her camera is. I can remember Frank Stauffacher saying to me, "Now, you haven't pawned the camera, have you?" He said this jokingly, but it was pawned. Usually, people get their cameras back, eventually. My later films were made with one that belonged to Sheba Ziprin. The "Misterioso" film [*Number 11*] and the long black-and-white film [*Number 12*] were shot with her camera, which is now in a pawn shop in Oklahoma City. The main parts of my film in Oklahoma last year were shot on a camera that belonged to Stuart Reed. That camera is in a barbershop in Anadarko, Oklahoma, where Mr. A.[sch]'s Wollensak also is, unfortunately.

After I first stopped making films, I made those paintings that you point at. Unless you've seen those, it's hard to describe what they really are. They are at least as good as the films. I'd been able to hear Charlie Parker and Thelonious Monk, both of whom had come to San Francisco, but wanted to make one final thing, another painting of Thelonious. When I came to New York City I realized that it would be impossible to make it in the form of a painting, because his music was so complex, and it would be better to make a film. I hadn't made films for at least five years by then. *Number 10* was a study for the "Misterioso" film. Generally speaking, those films were made by trying to collect interesting pictures, cutting them out, and then filing them. I had enormous files, possibly only two or three percent of which was shot. I had worked on this one thing for twenty

years, having collected a lot of that stuff before, but then when I left San Francisco I gave it to [James] Broughton, because I felt that he might do something with it. But he obviously never did.

After I came here I started filming again. Toward the end, I had everything filed in glassine envelopes: any kind of vegetable, any kind of animal, any kind of this that and the other thing, in all different sizes. Then file cards were made up. For example, everything that was congruent to that black-and-white film [*Number 12*] was picked out. All the permutations possible were built up: say, there's a hammer in it, and there's a vase, and there's a woman, and there's a dog. Various things could then be done—hammer hits dog; woman hits dog; dog jumps into vase; so forth. It was possible to build up an enormous number of cross-references.

This was all written on little slips of paper, the file cards—the possible combinations between this, that, and the other thing. The file cards were then rearranged, in an effort to make a logical story out of it. Certain things would have to happen before others: Dog runs with watermelon has to occur after dogs steals watermelon.

I tried as much as possible to make the whole thing automatic, the production automatic rather than any kind of logical process. Though at this point—Allen Ginsberg denies having said it—about the time I started making those films, he told me that William Burroughs made a change in the Surrealistic process—because, you know, all that stuff comes from the Surrealists—that business of folding a piece of paper. One person draws the head and then folds it over, and somebody else draws the body. What do they call it? The Exquisite Corpse. Somebody later, perhaps Burroughs, realized that something was directing it, that it wasn't arbitrary, and that there was some kind of what you might call God. It wasn't just chance. Some kind of universal process was directing these so-called arbitrary processes, and so I proceeded on that basis. Try to remove things as much as possible from the consciousness, or whatever you want to call it, so that the manual processes could be employed entirely in moving things around. As much as I was able, I made it automatic.

I must say that I'm amazed, after having seen the black-and-white film [*Number 12*] last night, at the labor that went into it. It is incredible that I had enough energy to do it. Most of my mind was pushed aside into some sort of theoretical sorting of the pieces, mainly on the basis that I have described. First, I collected the pieces out of old catalogs and books and whatever, then made up file cards of all possible combinations of them, then I spent maybe a few months trying to sort the cards into logical order. A script was made for that. All the script and the pieces were made for a film at least four times as long. There were wonderful masks and things cut out, like when the dog pushes the scene away at the end of the film. Instead of the title "end," what is really there is a transparent screen that has a candle burning behind it, on which a cat fight begins—shadow forms of cats begin fighting. Then all sorts of complicated effects. I had held these off. The radiations were to begin at this point. Then Noah's Ark appears. There were beautiful scratch-board drawings, probably the finest drawings I ever made—really pretty. Maybe two hundred were made for that one scene. Then there's a graveyard scene, when the dead are all raised again. What actually happens at the end of the film is everybody's put in a teacup, because all kinds of horrible monsters came out of the graveyard, like animals that folded into one another. Then everyone gets thrown in a teacup, which is made out of a head, and stirred up. This is the Trip to Heaven and the Return, then the Noah's Ark, then the Raising of the Dead, and finally the Stirring of Everyone in a Teacup. It was to be in four parts. The script was made up for the whole works on the basis of sorting pieces. It was exhaustingly long in its original form. When I say that it was cut, mainly what was cut out was, say, instead of the little man bowing and then standing up, he would stay bowed down much longer in the original. The cutting that was done was really a correction of timing. It's better in its original form.

Number 13 had all the characters out of *Oz* in it. That was assembled in the same way. I naturally divided *Oz* up into four lands, because *Oz* consists of the Munchkins, the Quadlings, the

Gillikins, and the Winkies, and then the Emerald City is in the middle. That is where the wizard's balloon had landed. I had built that thing many times as a child. I had fairly severe hallucinations, and I had built something called my Fairy Garden for many years. I actually used to see little gnomes and fairies and stuff until I was seven or eight. It's a typical psychic phenomenon, I mean, I wasn't nutty or anything. All children see that stuff. Up until I was eighteen or so, I worked hard on my Fairy Garden and then started building *Oz*. It was a fairly large place, because we had blocks and blocks of property in Anacortes. I built *Oz* a number of times. The final form, though, was for this film. It was to be a commercial film. Very elaborate equipment was built. The animation stand was about the size of a floor and exactly fourteen feet high. *Oz* was laid out on it, then seven levels built up. It was like the multiplane camera of Disney, except that I was using a Mitchell camera that moved around. That's how I got into so many difficulties. Van Wolf had not paid rent on the camera, which was a thousand dollars a week. He was the producer, but he was taking far too many pills to do much but try to wiggle out of situations that developed. He got various people to pay for it. Huntington Hartford, Harry Phipps, Peggy Hitchcock, Elizabeth Taylor and so forth, invested in the film.

It was divided into different things. I ditched the Munchkins, Quadlings, Gillikins, and Winkies in their original form. What I was really trying to do was to convert *Oz* into a Buddhist image like a mandala. I can't even remember what those lands were. One of them was "Hieronymus Bosch Land." All of Bosch's paintings were carefully dissected. Another one was "Microscopia," taken from the books of Haeckel, who was the Viennese biological artist and very wonderful. The things he made are just marvelous. He picked out every possible grotesque object that there was. There was another land that was entirely made out of flesh. Enormous vistas for miles were made out of naked people from dirty mags. That would have been a nice film! Most of my material was prepared for it, and over six hours of tests were shot to get the apparatus to operate correctly. Only the little piece in the drawer there was ever

synchronized to the music. In this particular section, the ballet music from *Faust*, the Tin Woodsman performs magic before leaving for the Emerald City. The sound track was made up for the whole film.

Dr. Leary had me interested in that black-and-white film [*Number 12*], although you realize that *Heaven and Earth Magic*, whatever it's called, was a color film at that point. It ran through a special machine that projected slides. This is the first one that occurs: as the first head is on the screen, the slide of the same image is projected around it. There was a fader that obscured the screen out at the edges. You don't realize that it's an oblong image. It's just that there's another head the same as this. That's the telephone operator who made the greatest number of phone calls in the United States in some particular year. Where everything dissolves into the bridge, you see it's taking place on the moon. When the machinery is all operating, it's inside a watermelon. The slides themselves run through another color apparatus, and the seats in the theater were to be on some kind of electrical contact or rubber pads, so that as the audience looked at the film, if a certain number of them would lean in one direction, that would activate little lights in the projection booth, which indicated that the audience who were in dentist chairs, watermelons, and so forth, were thinking about a watermelon or about a dentist chair, and so forth. Then I would slip that slide in, since any one of the slides could go with any portion of the film. They are now in an order that was convenient. It was an attempt to employ feedback phenomena. It was executed to a degree in Steinway Hall. Mr. Phipps set up a sort of presentation there. The whole thing was set up, and I arbitrarily guessed what the audience was thinking of from their responses. We didn't have any special chairs for them to sit in, though.

I never did finish that sentence about the relation of Surrealism to my things. I assumed that something was controlling the course of action and that it was not simply arbitrary, so that by sortilege (as you know, there is a system of divination called sortilege) everything would come out all right. *Number 14* was made on this basis.

Although I kept a record that such and such was shot in such and such an area of the screen, it was completely arbitrary.

PS: Was it your decision to leave the Kodak leader between rolls of film?

HS: I stole that idea from Andy Warhol. Everything that was shot was put in. A great number of images are missing. The stuff to which the most effort was devoted doesn't even show at all. A very large amount of material for some reason just isn't on the film. Peter Fleischman, who made that last film with me, and I spent weeks shooting objects that must have been all underexposed. I assumed when Ansco said that the film had a rating of 300, that it did have a rating of—it doesn't. It has a rating of perhaps 100. Most 300 of what was shot at the beginning and the end of the film disappeared because of that. The central portion was not developed for a long time. It was left lying around in the hot weather for about six months, so that it faded out and became white. I like the effect of the thing. It's all black at the beginning and the end, white in the middle, it looks good. Mr. Casper at Filmtronics made extremely good prints of the middle part. They are better than the original, but nonetheless, it didn't come out anything like I'd expected it to.

I started to get people for a film some months ago. How did that start? I think I asked Andy if he wanted to make a film, and he said, "Yeah!" So I said, "Look, can I have three hundred dollars?" He said, "Yeah." Who was it I asked next? I think Jack Smith. Then Robert Frank. At that point, it seemed ridiculous to make an underground movie. But to make a really elaborate super-underground movie for showing in neighborhood theaters—that would be the only one I would make. The project keeps bogging down, basically because I haven't been able to find anybody that knows enough about films in regular theaters. Arthur and Hugh Young have the money for it. I called them in a drunken condition and asked them for two million dollars, and Arthur said they perhaps would do it if they thought there were any possibility of producing an actual thing. In fact, I called them last Wednesday or Tuesday again, and they have been waiting all this time to look at films. They are

interested in astrology. It is necessary to get some handsome producer to produce the film, not to produce money but to decide whether it's to be a short feature or a short, like a Bugs Bunny length, so it can be distributed in first-run theaters.

It would be like a trip around the world. Various people would come in. It would be marvelous, for instance, if Andy were able to supervise maybe a twenty-minute color picture of Mount Fuji, but with a really good cameraman and technicians and everything so it would be really his beauty. Stan Vanderbeek was going to work on it. What he would do would be to go to northern Australia and animate aboriginal bark paintings. It would be produced eventually. Mr. Young once sent me a lavish check because he didn't like *Taras Bulba*. I'd called him the night before asking for money to go to Hollywood to try to salvage the *Oz* film. He said, "No, no, no, no. We're going to the movies. We're going to the movies. We don't have time to talk with you now, Harry. And we're not interested in films. And anyhow you're drunk. You're calling me a fart." However, the next morning, a check did come in the mail, and he wrote, "We didn't like *Taras Bulba* at all, and we decided to see if you could do better." However, I took the money and went to Miami Beach to see Peter's mother, instead of going to Hollywood. I've been afraid to phone them for a long time.

I don't think I'll make any more animated films. They're too laborious and bad for the health. Sitting under those lights for hours is terrible. I've made enough of those, just like I've made enough hand-drawn films. I would like to make an "underground" movie that could be shown everywhere in little towns, because it was seeing art films, or whatever they used to call them, that first got me interested in these things. Now there must be lots of kids all over the world that would make films if they saw some of the things that are being made now.

There was another good series of films I saw during the late 1920s. It always started with coming up to a door that had a little grille work in it, a mysterious little thing—the going in there, through it. Isadora Duncan was in one of those. You'd go through this door, and then

there would be some Turkish or Chinese exotic operations. Those and the Fu Manchu movies were the ones that influenced me most. Naturally, I would like to make some kind of artistic film that would be helpful to the progress of humanity. And that's the best one I can think of. There's no doubt in my mind that eventually someone is going to make a so-called underground movie that will revive Hollywood as Kenneth Anger writes of it.

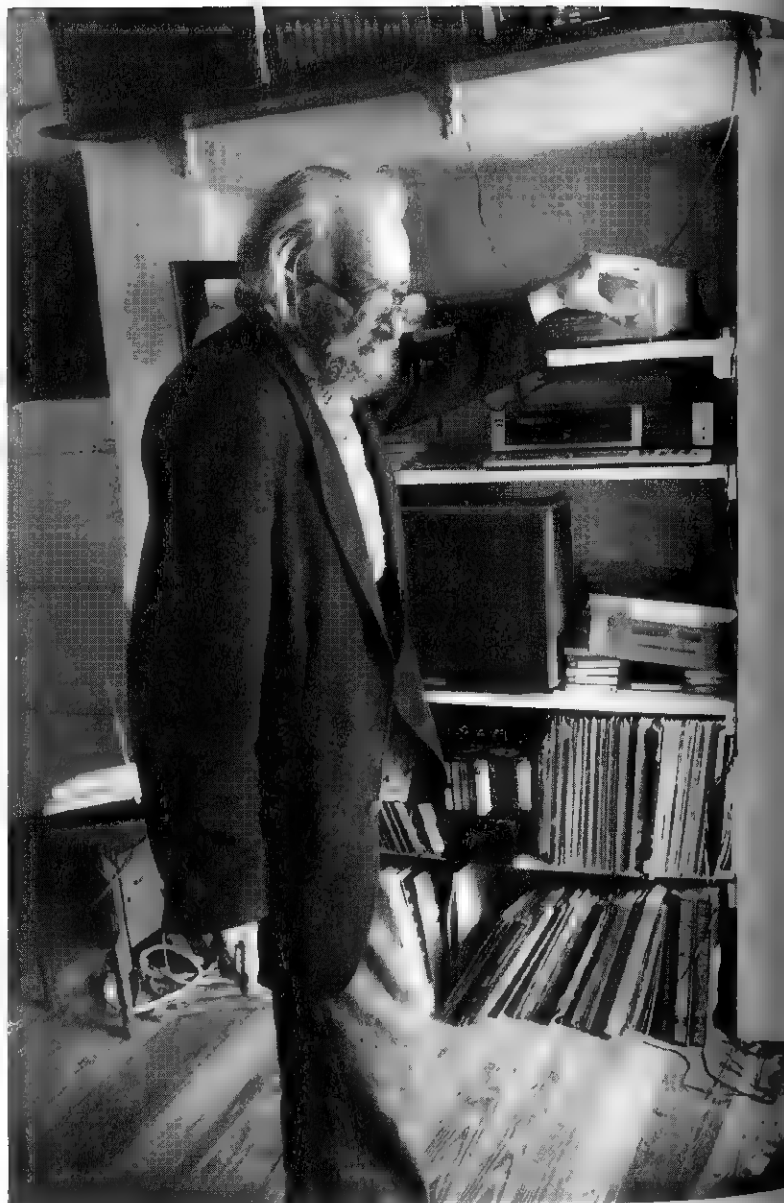


Photo by Brian Graham, 1986

John Cohen—Chelsea Hotel, NYC

Every cultural movement has its dynamic personalities, its popularizers, aestheticians, financiers, historians, and academicians. Despite himself, Harry Smith has emerged as the unheralded genius behind the scenes of the folk music movement in America. He is also greatly respected as an avant-garde filmmaker by avant-garde filmmakers, and his works have been shown at the Museum of Modern Art.

A visit to his room is a somewhat mystifying experience, for what appears on first impression as orderly piles of books and objects is actually a storehouse for cross-disciplinary investigations of visual, anthropological, and musical phenomena. The closet is filled with women's dresses from the Florida Seminole Indians. One corner of the room, marked with a "Keep Off" sign, is filled with Ukrainian Easter eggs; on the bureau are stacks of mounted string figures; behind the table is a movie camera alongside portfolios of his paintings and graphic work. In another corner is a clay model of an imaginary landscape which is re-created from a dream. On the walls hang empty frames from which the pictures have been ripped out. Under the desk lamp is the only other living thing besides Harry—a solitary goldfish in an orange clay bowl. A 19th century Pennsylvania Jacquard woven spread covers the bed. At other times there

have been piles of beautiful quilts and other weavings from that area, as well as a collection of paper airplanes from the streets of New York. Small file cabinets of index cards are distributed between the stacks of research books. Each book becomes more exotic by its juxtaposition with other such books—Mayan codices beside Eskimo anthropology studies, under a collection of Peyote ceremonial paintings, et cetera, et cetera.

In the notes to the *Folkways Anthology*, Harry included this quote: "Civilized Man Thinks Out His Difficulties, At Least He Thinks He Does, Primitive Man Dances Out His Difficulties," along with a quote from Aleister Crowley: "Do As Thy Wilt Shall Be The Whole Of The Law."

—John Cohen

[John Cohen discovered the original tapes from this interview, and generously offered them to us in 1997. This has led to an expanded version of the original Sing Out! interview, shedding additional information on the incredible mind of Harry Smith. Cohen's interview of thirty years ago has helped, from one generation to another, keep the spirit of Harry Smith alive and served as a bridge for the folk revival of the '60s.]

JC: If the readers of *Sing Out!* know of you at all, it would be from the *Folkways Anthology of American Folk Music*, which was issued a long time ago [1952]. That is just a part of what a total picture of you might be. Perhaps we could start and talk about the *Anthology* in context with everything else that you do.

HS: This whole thing is typed up...it's corrected later. You didn't bring enough tape. I don't know what the purpose of doing this would be. Perhaps if we talk a long time, my brain will begin operating better. It doesn't sound like a good thing to do; start at the beginning and work forward. You don't want to work backwards?

JC: How was it that you first went to see Moe Asch?

HS: Somehow I went to sell him records, and soon he said; "Why not issue some?" I was selling him records for a dollar or thirty-five cents apiece. I hadn't thought of putting an album together at that point. Perhaps Pete Kauffman told me to go see Moe.

JC: To unload the ones that you had.

HS: They were good records. He issued a lot of them, common things like Bukka White. I sold him things that were not quite up to what I wanted to keep.

JC: Were these rejects from what became the *Anthology*?

HS: I had either hundreds or thousands of records when I first came here. They're at Lincoln Center now. The *Anthology* was not an attempt to get all the best records (there are other collections where everything is supposed to be beautiful), but a lot of these were selected because they were odd—an important version of the song, or one which came from some particular place. For example, there were things from Texas included that weren't very good. There was a Child ballad, "Henry Lee" [Child 68]. It's not a good record, but it was the lowest-numbered Child ballad. Then there were other things put in simply because they were good performances, like "Brilliancy Medley" occurs to me. You couldn't get a representative cross-section of music into such a small number of records [six LPs]. Instead, they were selected to be ones that would be popular among musicologists, or possibly with people who would want to

sing them and maybe would improve the version. They were basically picked out from an epistemological, musicological selection of reasons.

JC: In its own way, that selection told me where traditional American music came from, and predicted everything that followed in popular music. It was the first opportunity many of us had to hear the country blues, early hillbilly, and Cajun music.

HS: Similar things like Cajun music were available from the Library of Congress before the *Anthology*, and there were current Cajun 45s from Louisiana, but most people hadn't heard them. The first I heard Uncle Dave Macon was somebody playing old records in the basement of a funeral home that had been converted into a Salvation Army shop in Seattle. During the war they bought up all the records to melt them down or something, so there were masses of records everywhere. There were masses of Japanese records. The Japanese were moved away from there very quickly and they had to sell everything, so I got a lot of good Japanese records, some of them recorded as early as 1895. I collected old Chinese records from about the same period. They'd be as early as any phonograph records made. So I heard an Uncle Dave Macon record in this shop in Vancouver. I'd never heard anything like that. It was "Fox and Hounds," and I couldn't imagine what it was. Bertrand Bronson at the University of California played one Buell Kazee record for me. He had a collection of records, and he'd bought some Kazees when they first came out because they had Child ballads on them. It was the "Wagoner's Lad" and whatever is on the other side. Maybe that's where I first heard Buell Kazee? It was on Brunswick Records. Brunswick records were hard to get.

JC: You'd not heard of Eck Robertson before you bought his records, had you?

HS: No, but you could tell they were of top quality. The first records I bought were in Bellingham when I was in high school, around 1940.

JC: Were you still in high school in 1940?

HS: Sure. It was a Tommy McClellan record that had somehow got into this town by mistake. It sounded strange and I looked for others and found Memphis Minnie. I started looking in other towns and found Yank Rachell records in Mt. Vernon, Washington. Then during the record drive—I then arranged for other people to look for old records.

JC: You arranged for it?

HS: People collected records because you could sell them for scrap. There were big piles of 78s—enormous groaning masses of them. Someone found a Washington Phillips record. In looking through books like those by Odum and Johnson, there were lists of records. In Jean Thomas's book *The Lost Fiddler* they mentioned Jilson Setters, so I started looking for those. There was a book from the 1920s published by Howard University, where I first heard about Blind Lemon Jefferson and Blind Willie Johnson.

JC: In other words, you didn't just buy records in response to a voice. You knew something beforehand.

HS: I was looking for exotic records.

JC: Exotic in what terms? Lemon Jefferson wouldn't have been exotic in Mississippi.

HS: Exotic in relation to what was considered to be the world culture of high class music. I'm sure you can find places in Mississippi where they listen to Paul Whiteman. There was a certain type of music that everyone was exposed to in the 1920s: the Charleston, Blackbottom, et cetera. The babysitters I had were doing those things. I was carried along, I presume. You're really more interested in the hillbilly records, aren't you?

JC: No, I'm interested in all...

HS: I didn't find any real hillbilly records for much longer after I had been collecting blues records.

JC: The blues records were first?

HS: It was fortuitous that the records I got had this harmonica player, Yank Rachell, and Sleepy John Estes playing the mandolin, I believe. It was exotic in the same way that Turkish music is. I don't

remember who the first hillbilly singers were I heard. I think I got into it through Irish music, in that same store where I was trying to get Romanian bagpipe records. You could get a lot of that sort of record in Oakland, California, by then. I went there for something else. At a party for Woody Guthrie...

JC: You knew him back then?

HS: Someone had taken me to hear him. The person who invited me was connected with Harry Bridges. In the hall I suddenly met a lot of people who had interest in records and stuff. Being naive, I didn't realize they were revolutionaries trying to blow up the state capitol or something. It could have been at some longshoreman's hall in 1942. I'm sure it was like Communists. But I didn't like his singing. It was too sophisticated and too involved with social problems, I felt. It wasn't the sort of stuff I was interested in.

JC: But that might have been part of what got you hearing the first hillbilly records?

HS: No, I must have had a few by then. As a matter of fact, I had. Someone at a place called Central Store, on Long Island, sent a letter to James McKuen, who was a record collector who used to collect blues records. It was a typed list of Paramount records that he'd found in this store—all brand new records. They were something like a dollar a piece. McKuen sent me the list and said that I could get what I wanted. Everybody was stupid that they didn't buy the whole thing. We didn't know. It was luck—hundreds of people we hadn't heard. I got interested in the Child ballads from seeing Carl Sandburg's *American Songbag*. I was living in a small town in Washington, and my father would bring me books from the library. I don't know why he brought that home, but he had been a cowboy himself and knew a lot of the songs. Now this sounds horrible and ruins my reputation, but one of the first people I heard was John Jacob Niles. He gave a concert at the University of Washington. I found records of his and naturally threw them out as soon as I found out that there was something better. But looking for those songs, maybe "Wild Bill Jones," I found versions on Champion—repressings from Gennett. It was a commercial version of the song, a

curiosity, because something that had survived orally for a long time suddenly turned into something that Sears, Roebuck sold, and you could order it from Pakistan or wherever you might be. I would presume that my interest in the quality of the music went back to my mother and father. My mother sang Irish songs all the time, and my father sang cowboy songs. But they were naive of the implications of it.

JC: My mother knew a version of "The Butcher's Boy" from the sidewalks of New York early in this century.

HS: It was recorded very early. A lot of those things came out on pressings that Elvridge Johnson made. They are eight-inch records, all autographed by whoever made them. I think they are all preceding 1888. They were made to be sold through New England and they are of higher quality than what came later. Things like "Frog Went A-Courting," plus really amazing Victorian ballads, super-dilly things like they imitate in movies when they show the Gay Nineties. Well, there are actual records of that stuff out. It's amazing subject matter, all connected with children freezing to death. I would presume, a realistic picture of life at that point, which has been suppressed because they don't like it to get out that children starved to death then. It was the big period of orphanages, just like it's the big period of broken homes now. A great many of these songs on the records were in a snowstorm, the poor kid peddling the papers at the ferry slip in order to get medicine for the father who is at home dying of Asiatic cholera or something. Now how did I get onto that? Well, a variety of these things converged.

JC: Where did you first hear of the Carter Family?

HS: I would think from that mimeographed list that the Library of Congress issued around 1937, *American Folksongs on Commercially Available Records*. Shortly after that, two Carter Family records, "Worried Man Blues" and "East Virginia Blues" were reissued on the album *Smokey Mountain Ballads*. That album would come to stores that wouldn't ordinarily have Carter Family records.

JC: In that album John and Alan Lomax made hillbilly music respectable enough to have it sold along with art music and symphonies.

HS: Sort of. There was no market for hillbilly records where I was living. I can't imagine there being a market for anything when I reconstitute their musical taste. But there were several groups of Southern country people like the Carter Family in the hills south of Seattle. I bought several dulcimers there. My mother found the best one in a Salvation Army. It had been made in those hills south of Seattle. Somebody wrote a doctoral thesis on those people. They were immigrants that came in 1890 from the Southern mountains. Later I had found Carter Family records in a store in Tacoma, Washington. There was no place in Seattle that sold them.

JC: You must have been interested enough in the Carter Family to go see Sara Carter.

HS: That was much later.

JC: How much later?

HS: As soon as I found out about the Carter Family, it was either from the records—I think John Lomax has something to do with it, somehow. Either from the mimeographed list, which may be 1937, or from the record, which I assume was issued about 1939 or '40. I remember I was somewhat disappointed in the music in it, because it sounded mechanical and watered down from the real thing.

JC: Where did you hear the real thing?

HS: Well, on records, you see. I located a few good records. Paramount had a very good hillbilly series. I think it was a 3000 series. As soon as I discovered how to look for records—which was to find a store that had gone bankrupt—I found places like that in Port Townsend where the Brunswick records were. The Victor ones were in a place north of San Francisco. But there were boxes, unbroken boxes that the records had been shipped in, of just about everything.

JC: This would be records from the late '20s early '30s and you were buying them unopened in the '40s?

HS: Yeah, sure. The hillbilly stuff naturally was not touched. There were thousands of records. After all there were masses of other stuff. Green-label Mexican records. Ones made in Trinidad and Barbados. It must have been a complete supplying place. Probably a hundred thousand records—I don't know how many. I rapidly amassed many thousands of records. It became like a problem.

JC: Was it an obsession, or a hobby, or an investigation?

HS: It was an obsessive, investigative hobby or something.

JC: How were you paying for it?

HS: I can't remember how I paid for those first ones, because I went back to Seattle and left the Paramount records there. Naturally, it got to the point that I had to weed the worst things out. I met Griff Borgeson, the one who later found Sara Carter. He and his wife went in out of a thunderstorm to an auto court in the Gold Rush mountain country of California. We had become interested in the Carter Family by then, and Griff just casually mentioned, "Oh yes, we've been seeing Sara Carter lately." For a while I couldn't believe it. I couldn't live until I found out where. They wanted me to guess where it was. So after I found out, I went up there and stayed a few days, a couple of times.

JC: When would that have been, and what would you do for a day with Sara Carter? What year would that have been?

HS: Would it have been 1945? She was making patchwork quilts, and I photographed them in color.

JC: Why?

HS: You have to realize that I'd been studying anthropology at the University of Washington, so I had an interest in that sort of thing. I didn't know what I was going to do with them. They were like very nice abstract designs. I tried to get her to name certain designs which she thought resembled certain songs. She didn't understand me or what I was trying to say. It was some kind of a Rorschach response like thing. She'd say, "Well that one is called 'Field of Diamonds,' I guess that's like 'Diamonds in the Rough.'" That was about as close as she came. I always took 5 x 7 pictures. We discussed songs.

JC: What was your intended use for these correlations between song titles and quilt designs?

HS: Oh, that would be some kind of compulsive activity. I don't know what the source of it would be. If you interpret things by some kind of neo-Freudian interpretation, it can be said to be a compulsive act, like a development out of making mud pies. They're a development of something worse, or better, whatever it is. I don't believe I liked the Carter Family singing too well until later. For some reason I didn't take any records. I thought it would be ostentatious. She was upset that I hadn't brought records. She only had one record of hers, which was a worn-out white-label Bluebird. Of their recordings, I liked the first session they made the best. The room tone is more natural. Like, "John Hardy" and "Single Girl." She gave me a bunch of pictures of different things, like posing in Dr. Brinkley's garden with huge plaster fountains or with different groups that she had played with. They seem to have recorded every single song they made for Dr. Brinkley's ads. They had a program that advertised his, whatever it was—monkey gland emporium. It had several stations, XERA and XERB. I don't know whether collectors have located them or not.

JC: I'm interested in why you would inflict this kind of test on Sara Carter.

HS: It was like a way of investigating something. It was just what I might have been doing with the Indians at the same time. Before I got interested in record collecting, I got interested in the Indians. When I was in the fourth or fifth grade, somebody in class said they'd been to an Indian reservation. This was in Anacortes, Washington, on an island. It was only settled during the 1890s. My grandparents were there when there were hardly any white people—if you want to classify people according to color. So, in school they said they saw someone doing a dance, swinging a skull around. They gave their report on this in class. So I thought I had to go to that, and it was really impressive. It was a very good time to see Indian dances. And I made a lot of recordings there, which unfortunately

disappeared with everything else I had. But they may be somewhere. By the time I was in high school, being as the school bus went to take people back to the Indian reservation, I would usually ride out there after school every day. So that was a continuous project over a long period of time.

JC: You were studying their visual patterns as well?

HS: Everything I could think of. I took photographs and made recordings, collected string figures—anything I'd seen in the standard anthropology books about what was liable to be the culture elements in that area. It was something to do. I presume it was because I was leading an isolated life. I mean, we were considered some kind of a "low" family, despite my mother's feeling that she was the Czarina of Russia. We were living down by the railroad tracks, and I only realized a month ago that probably the rest of the people in town looked down on us. There were other odd types who lived along this railroad line. My parents came from good families. My great-grandfather was the [Lieutenant] Governor of Illinois. My mother came from a long line of school teachers in Alaska.

JC: Someone once told me that you were thinking for a while that your father might have been some English mystic who was traveling through.

HS: That was Aleister Crowley, and as a matter of fact, my mother did know Crowley at about that time. She saw him running naked down the beach, perhaps in 1913 or 1915. I wish I had gone more into the chronology of my antecedents.

JC: But he's not your father.

HS: I don't know.

JC: Oh, you mean there's a possibility?

HS: Sure. I suppose there's a possibility that President Coolidge was. Because of my father's and grandfather's interest in mysticism, the basement was full of books on whether Bacon wrote Shakespeare's plays, alchemy, and so forth. I had a whole blacksmith shop. I spent a lot of time trying to transmute lead into gold. My father was in the salmon fishing business, and during the war

they fished the Fraser and Columbia rivers dry, so the canneries closed, and that was my playground as a child.

JC: Was it your interest in the color patterns of the Indians which you transferred to Sara Carter?

HS: Well, I made films at that point, the earliest abstract color films, which preceded meeting Sara Carter.

JC: Had you seen abstract color films before? Why do you think you made them?

HS: I didn't have a camera and I wanted to make a movie, so somebody said why not draw on the film. It seemed like a good idea. I believe it was trying to find out about those designs. I wanted to find out if there was any correspondence between certain color patterns and certain sounds. It's a natural obsession not only with me, but with Sir Isaac Newton or Ostwald. They all try that business. It turns out to be a complete fantasy. There is no one-for-one correspondence between color and sound. I was looking for rhythmic designs to put into the films, which at that point were based on the heartbeat—the speed of the heart, which is about seventy-two beats per minute, and the respiration, which is about thirteen. Then when I saw patchwork quilts, they looked like hand-drawn films, and I wondered if they could be transferred. There are a lot of reasons why I did that. It was partly because we were in the Mother Lode country. There wasn't much to do to occupy the day.

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HS: I don't recall the exact number of records I had. I think it was 2,000 records, which had been cut down from 20,000, at one point. They were so piled around that it was impossible. There was no way of listening to them, but you didn't want to skip anything that might be good.

JC: What was the condition of your housing in California? Was it then as it is now? Working with movies, Indian art, and anthropology all at the same time?

HS: It's all the same thing. I gave a few lectures on jazz at the University of California, but I never went to school there. I intended to go to school there. There were two apartments upstairs in the building. My door was 5 1/2 Panoramic Way. I was living in Berkeley. I went to Berkeley the day after the war ended. I had been working at Boeing aircraft company. Everybody suddenly lost their jobs.

JC: What were you doing with Boeing? Factory work?

HS: Mechanic. A spy actually, but I posed as a mechanic. I was trying to work my way through the University of Washington, but it was impossible. I couldn't work all night and go to school all day. Eventually somebody said, "You want to go to Berkeley?" I did the work in the yard, like mow the lawn. It looked worse after I was through with it. Then I ruined the room making movies in there. I got ink and paint on everything. I was trying to record jazz bands there. Someone sat on the wash basin and ripped it off the wall and caused a flood. Upstairs lived Doctor Bronson, who had some good records. He tried to be nice to me. I didn't realize he was a great thing at that point. He tried to play the violin to illustrate some obscure point, and I was sort of eeegh—I didn't know what to think. But he did have these few records—like Buell Kazee. I waited until he was out of town lecturing, and traded his wife some other records for them. He really hit the ceiling when he got back. But I did give him some good stuff. He eventually liked it. See, I had two copies of B. F. Shelton's "Pretty Polly." It was scarce, and he sings better than Buell Kazee, so I thought, "Why doesn't he take it?" Now I'm sorry I didn't find out more about Bronson's theories of whatever it is. Something like glottal-chronology, only applied to music.

JC: Somewhere along the line you were a painter. Did you study art?

HS: With the local artist in Anacortes, Washington, where I was raised for a long time, from the time I was in the third grade till my last year in high school. I didn't even leave the town. My constant desire was to get to Seattle, which is about a hundred miles away.

My parents would only go twenty m.p.h. for fear of being killed. The nearest we could get, occasionally, was Bellingham.

JC: Let's see if we can return to the *Anthology*. The story that I thought about was that you walked into Folkways and asked for Moe Asch and said to him, "I know more about folk music than you do."

HS: I easily could have said that. I was a snotty little thing, you know. Well, it was apparent that I did. Asch knows a lot about world folk music at this point. I'm not really interested in things on that level anymore.

JC: Were you interested in folk music as such, or folk music as part of something else?

HS: As part of something else, but I wouldn't know what, though. It has something to do with the desire to communicate in some way, the collection of objects. Now I like to have something around that has a lot of information in it, and since then, it seems to me that books are an especially bad way of recording information. They are really an outmoded thing. Books aren't very old anyhow—Gutenberg wasn't that long ago. Now everybody is tossing paper in such masses that it's all over the street. So I've been interested in other things that gave a heightened experience in relation to the environment. Some people are nature lovers, some become export bankers; however, I presume that all these are methods to communicate according to the cultural background that they have. So I'm interested in getting series of objects of different sorts. It's a convenient way of finding information, for whatever use. It does seem apparent, since I started collecting records, that there are definite correlations between different artistic expressions in one particular social situation, like a consistency in small lines in aboriginal Australian art. And the music is the same thing, short words. It may be connected with language. My recent interest has been much more in linguistics than it has been in music, because it's something that can be satisfactorily transcribed, whereas I haven't seen satisfactory transcriptions of music.

JC: The means of measuring folk music are inadequate?

HS: There is no interest in it. The needs of folk music are met by nothing more than reprints of earlier books on the subject. Occasionally there is a good book with good transcriptions from American Indians or Africa. It depends on the cultural contact, the reason for doing the thing. By the time that phonemics had been developed to the point that it would have been possible to transcribe folk songs, there was no money-making reason to do it, for after all, the purpose of making books on folk songs is to make money. Everybody has to eat. We're all trapped in a social system where you have to do something to provide food and shelter. I thought for a while that drinking got me out of food and shelter, but it's a way of living that is pushed underground. Thousands and thousands of derelicts.

JC: I've heard people accuse you of living off others—trying to disregard that whole concept of doing things that would earn your living. You've bothered me, my friends, and others in the sense that you don't accept the fact that you have to earn money to be a fruitful part of society. Now that's a hard thing for me to say.

HS: Certainly, I said it just before you did. Naturally, that situation exists. There are certain ways you can evade that responsibility, but it's like, the wages of sin is death. I try not to do that. I've reformed, but the strain on the poor fevered brain of adjusting to capitalism after years of being a sort of Robin Hood type.

JC: I'm trying to translate your analogy now in terms of your own work. Of what value is your work to society, Harry?

HS: It's provided tunes that people made things off of. Now at this point, there is a whole school of filmmakers that imitate some of my double-exposure films. They phone me constantly to say they're making a film like that. They want to thank me. That type of film is a good idea—so you don't care what happens really, you just shoot anything on top of anything—that solves problems. I haven't wanted to do anything that would be injurious. It's very difficult working out a personal philosophy in relation to the environment. Consistently I have tried different methods to give out the maximum. Some Czechoslovakians who visited recently looked on my films as outstanding, while nobody here thinks very much of them.

Or what's his name, Godard, asked especially for me when he visited town, et cetera, et cetera. So one of the things I've done is films, and I believe I added pleasure to people's lives through that. When I was interested in music, the simple fact of collecting new copies of a lot of records that will be important in the future is as valuable as anything. After I assembled the *Anthology* and sold the remaining records to the Public Library in 1951, that was the end of that project. Then I devoted a great deal of time to painting, but through mischance I destroyed all of my paintings, and I abandoned my films somewhere in a theater because I didn't want to see them again. Somebody got ahold of them and made copies—and when I wanted better copies I got interested again. I try to bring people together.

JC: There were clues about yourself on the *Anthology*, which have eventually been deleted. For instance, today the album cover shows a Depression photo of a Southern farmer, whereas the cover of the original presented a list of the material printed over a background in subtle colors which was...

HS: It's Theodore DeBry drawing out of Robert Fludd books. The whole *Anthology* was a collage. I thought of it as an art object. It took a long time to do. Naturally it gets cut up. I don't think that the *Anthology* has much effect anymore, frankly. I'm glad that it was well received.

JC: A hand coming from the clouds tuning this dulcimer...

HS: Monochord—like something or other tuning the Celestial Monochord. It's forming earth, air, fire, and water and the different astrological signs.

JC: You picked these out as the background for the *Anthology*?

HS: There were to be four of them, and four volumes to the first series. Red, Blue, and Green were issued, so that the element that was left out was earth. The type of thinking that I applied to records, I still apply to other things, like Seminole patchwork or to Ukrainian Easter eggs. The whole purpose is to have some kind of a series of things. Information as drawing and graphic designs can be located more quickly than it can be in books. The fact that I have all the

Seminole designs permits anything that falls into the canon of that technological procedure to be found there. It's like flipping quickly through. It's a way of programming the mind, like a punch card of a sort. Being as it goes in through the vision, it is more immediately assimilated than if you have to listen to a two-minute record. Besides, you can pretty much find the records a person would like on radio. There is a sort of correspondence between what is popular and what is immediately satisfying.

JC: The Beatles were playing on your radio when I walked in.

HS: I'm tired of all of them. By the time "Hey Jude" has been played so many times, it makes one nauseous. It sounded alright for the first five times, but when it got into the hundreds.... There was some Simon and Garfunkel record, *Bookends*. It makes you ill when you hear it so many times. It sounded alright yesterday because I hadn't heard it in months. I feel it's ghastly. You don't want my opinion on The Beatles? Their future?

JC: Yes. Tell me their future? We know their past.

HS: We'll look in the crystal ball. I should think that it will be pretty good. If they can stand up under the strain.

JC: On one hand, listening to you talk about series of things, understanding the phenomena, it would lead one to think that you're a very scientific person. But to another degree you're not.

HS: I don't think so. Intuition is employed in determining, in what category, information can be got out of. I intuitively decided I wanted to collect records. After that had been determined, what was then decided to be good or bad was based on a comparison of that record to other records. Or the perfection of the performance. To a great degree, it seems like a conditioned reflex. What is considered good? Practically anything can be good. Consciousness can only take in so much. You can only think of something as *so* good. When you get up among, say, top musicians or top painters—which one is the best? Either things are enjoyable or they are unenjoyable. I determined what the norms were. You can tell if you hear a few fiddle records, when one is the most removed [exceptional] violin playing of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. If that seemed to be

consistent within itself, that would be the good record; if it was a good performance of what it was. Now, it was merely my interest in looking for exotic music. The things that were the most exotic—whether it happened to be the words or melodies or the timbre of the instruments—that really was what selected those things. Before the *Anthology* there had been a tendency in which records were lumped into blues catalogs or hillbilly catalogs. That was one thing the *Anthology* was for...and everybody was having blindfold tests to prove they could tell which was which. That's why there's no such indications of that sort [color/racial] in the albums. I wanted to see how well certain jazz critics did on the blindfold test. They all did horribly. It took years before anybody discovered that Mississippi John Hurt wasn't a hillbilly.

JC: To my mind, the *Anthology* anticipated the popular rock and roll music which followed. Many rock musicians are returning to those sounds. To me, today's music seems like an extension of the music on the *Anthology*.

HS: That's what I was trying to do, because I thought that is what this type of folk music would lead to. I felt social changes would result from it. I'd been reading from Plato's *Republic*. He's jabbering on about music, how you have to be careful about changing the music because it might upset or destroy the government. Everybody gets out of step. You are not to arbitrarily change it, because you may undermine the Empire State Building without knowing it. Of course, I thought it would do that. I thought it would develop into something more spectacular than it did, though. I had the feeling that the essence that was heard in those types of music, would become something that was really large and fantastic. In a sense, it did in rock and roll. I imagine it having some kind of a social force for good. I used to think about this a lot while I listened to the jukebox in Oakland, California—exactly what was going to lead into something else. You could certainly predict the outcome of musical ideas. It is very hard to say why those things happened, because the sources I derived my material from had been already analyzed by the Library of Congress checklists and a few other books that I'd found.

JC: You once told me of your many new plans for Volume Four of the *Anthology*.

HS: The real reason that it didn't come out was that I didn't have sufficient interest in it. I wanted to make more of a content analysis. I made phonetic transcriptions of all the words in the songs, but those notebooks got lost. The content analysis was like how many times the word *railroad* was used during the Depression and how many times during the war. The proportions of different words that might have some significant meaning beyond their exterior, certain ideas becoming popular. The word *food* was used increasingly in the record catalogs during the Depression. I finally analyzed the catalogs rather than the records, because you can't do anything with such a small sample as there are in that set.

JC: To me the *Anthology* was more of a statement of interrelationships than a sampling.

HS: Well, the problems that were involved in those interrelationships have been solved since then, so there is no particular reason to bring those records out. They aren't as relevant—there isn't as great a possibility of them doing good, as certain other things might. Like I have all these recordings of the peyote ritual, Kiowa Indian music that I recorded in Oklahoma. Its release has been held up for years, because I haven't completed the cover. Mr. Asch has spoken about bringing out that final album. It requires a totally different type of notes.

JC: Lots of it has already been reissued. The germs planted in the original *Anthology* have been taken over by one small company which specializes in reissuing hillbilly records or another which specializes in early folk music.

HS: Well, because it went with the others and was planned at the same time that the others were, they were picked out to be in a certain order. The thing that would be the most interesting at this point would be a historical statement as to why it was issued so late. I think it would still have some value as a thing to listen to.

JC: Besides the films, your recent projects and recordings have all been with American Indians.

HS: Consistently. When I was in Oklahoma I realized that it was possible to perform some kind of saturated study of something. It just happened that it was with recordings, although I went there to make films. It just happened that the people were much more musical than the situations were photogenic. The Seminole project grew out of that, but I didn't record their music. Then the egg business grew out of the Seminole stuff. These are technological processes of some sort. The problems that I'd set myself on have to do with correlating music into some kind of a visual thing, into some kind of a diagram. It was much simpler to skip the music entirely and study diagrams that had already been made. Being as my essential interest in music was the patterning that occurred in it—intuition or taste only being a guide to directions where this patterning might occur—it was just as well to collect some other object. I'm sure that if you could collect sufficient patchwork quilts from the same people who made the records, like Uncle Dave Macon or Sara Carter's houses, you could figure out just about anything you can from the music. Everything could be figured out regarding their judgment in relation to certain intellectual processes. Like certain things sound good to a person in music, certain things look good to the eye. And at some level those two things are interconnected. One thing is to try and compress data, whatever it happens to be, into a small area and study that thing, for the same reason an archaeologist studies pot shards, because you can sit down in trenches and determine stylistic trends. At the end of gathering all this data, whether it's music or whatever, it has to be correlated with other fields of knowledge.

JC: Looking at the various projects you've been working on, with their visually bright-colored patterns, I see a progression of geometric designs, from bold patchwork quilts to Seminole designs with small patterns, and even more intensely so in the Ukrainian eggs. My mind makes an associative jump to what has become psychedelic posters.

HS: I've drawn things like that, but so have others.

JC: In some ways your drawings remind me of drawings done by young men and women on drugs. They were from Paris, shortly after the war. They had the same attention to details.

HS: Oh, those were like psychedelic paintings. Those people had taken mescaline or something. Precision art—I suppose it's like amphetamine art. Basically, it's like staring at little tiny things. You can make millions of circles. I don't particularly like that effect because it takes too much time to get something meaningful. You probably think I'm precise, but it tricks the eye.

JC: I remember in a printed catalog accompanying an evening of your films, it mentioned different drugs that were involved in the production of each film.

HS: At different points of my life I've taken some kind of drug or other. Naturally, I've taken them many, many years ago. The first one of those that became available was peyote. I first took it on the road just outside Sara Carter's auto court. I wasn't sure if the top of my head wasn't going to fly off. Someone had bought the proper type of cactus in the floral department of a department store in San Francisco, so we ate it. Anything that changes the consciousness to a degree, I think, is useful. I presume it's a schizophrenic thing on my part, but it is helpful to be able to look at something that you have made as if you hadn't made it. By the time a person makes a drawing or anything, so much time has been devoted to it that you're conscious of what's involved in it. Probably any drugs are helpful, even alcohol.

JC: Peyote gets one involved with the colors. What about some of the other subtleties of the states of mind that are available?

HS: I've tried different drugs as they became available. The results have been well investigated and they fall into a few categories. Some, like peyote, cause visual hallucinations. LSD, which is similar in many ways, causes hallucinations of destruction.

JC: Did you ever work on a film under LSD?

HS: I made films after that, and naturally I used any information that had been gained. But if you were taking LSD, you'd probably get your fingers caught in the gears. That sort of drug is really to

gather data, possibly freeing the mind or for euphoric effects, or expanding it. Recently someone [Ed Sanders] said that what is needed is a consciousness-contracting drug. The mind is too expanded. I don't particularly like the effects of LSD. I wouldn't take any willfully. Psilocybin from mushrooms is interesting, because it's described in transcripts from the Aztecs a few hundred years ago. It would be interesting to see if it still produces the same effects. It would make you think, I would say. I don't like drugs that put me to sleep.

JC: I'm curious as to how many different ways there are of seeing things.

HS: Well, all those things tend to some sort of euphoric effect, but certain cases, like nitrous oxide, are notorious for giving people the feeling that they've solved the problems of the universe and boiled it down to one word. In fact, the person who invented it, Humphry Davy, thought it did that for years. It was only discovered much later that it was an anesthetic. The varieties of experience—I don't think any serious research has been done. Just teams of scientists converging on San Francisco. But most cultures seem to use some sort of a mood-changing thing. I don't think there are any new inventions along that line. You know, they were constantly baking LSD in France in the bread by mistake. Ergot gets in it and the whole town goes crazy. For thousands of years it's been inherent in the baking of bread that it gets ergot, and panic sweeps over the place. I saw an article where they tie up the fact that revolutionary movements or peasant revolts in Central Asia and Russia since 1400 have occurred during a shortage or famine.

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HS: It seems that all human types occur everywhere and the releases are about the same. There's usually something that acts as a hypnotic, like alcohol or opium. Other things produce visions. Actually, the two opposites are right in peyote: it's a strychnine and mescaline. I do think drugs are an important aspect of research into

whatever I'm doing research into. It's like a way of greasing the mental processes, to a degree. Now, some of these things are supposed to be bad for you. I should say, though, that most drugs taken over a period of a few hundred years in any culture probably aren't harmful. And that would include things of all categories, because things like kava from the Pacific, and pituri from Australia, datura in this country [Jimsonweed—a hypnotic formerly used by the California Indians] are all hallucinogens. Depending on the social atmosphere of a particular time, they're either considered good or bad.

JC: I've noticed that hypnotic dancing often occurs in association with a musical drone. This seems to be part of the trance that one sees in both White and Negro Holiness churches.

HS: Is that what the doctor is trying to cure me of, breaking into dance and speaking in tongues? I don't think it's particularly valuable to investigate that. The thing that's interesting in those places is the personality of the individual, because the major message that has to be brought across to people is that everybody is thinking the same, although the stuff that is passed down or inherited determines the things that are thought about. The thought processes are all the same. The study of local trance dances doesn't really fit the existing situation as far as music exists in different parts of the world. It's more important to let other people here know that Africans can produce good music than it is to study the history of these things. These problems are eminent to the survival of humanity. Soon they'll be fighting about who owns the moon. A selection has to be made—at least in the field of the humanities, which I assume things like art and music are in—of things that seem to be productive in a period when the population is seemingly expanding to the point where the food supply is difficult to shuttle around. A direction has to be given to types of studies. What was this in connection with?

JC: Do you think that an effect similar to drugs could be found in trance dancing throughout the world?

HS: I don't think there is such a connection. I think all of these cultures would use some sort of drug, the major types. The hallucinating types are more widespread than the hypnotic types. But because of the power of Europe, the hypnotic drugs, mainly alcohol, have been dragged all over. I don't know how it is determined that a person is advancing in a trance anyhow, for there aren't any stable criteria for that. It's socially acceptable in Holiness churches, but it's a very strict thing. I mean, if they start stripping off their clothes in their trance, they are going to be in possible trouble. I don't see that much connection between people in different parts of the world going into trances. It all depends on the upbringing of the anthropologist, how deeply imbued he is with the puritanical background of the societies that produce anthropologists, which are pretty limited. It's a very specialized thing to study trances. It's astounding that people can be supported to do that.

JC: Are you supported to do what you do?

HS: Pretty much. People keep giving me money. Foundations would, but they don't give enough. They are always dissatisfied with me for not doing enough. That with the amount of labor to get a few thousand dollars from a foundation, it's simpler to get it from somebody who will deduct it from their income tax.

JC: Izzy Young once explained to me how you'll go to him to borrow a dollar to get to where you can borrow ten dollars, to get to a train to Philadelphia to borrow a hundred thousand dollars.

HS: Yes, the chain usually breaks down with Izzy. He refuses the dollar, so the whole two hundred thousand is lost. That's typical. I'm supported well for what I want. I want a limited amount of things. It all depends on my mood.

JC: That fella who made that film *Chappaqua*. There was some connection?

HS: Rooks. The poet Philip Lamantia sent Mr. Rooks. I was instrumental in getting him interested in films. I don't want to say anything about *Chappaqua*.

JC: Robert Frank was brought in to *Chappaqua* on your recommendation.

HS: Sure.

JC: An involvement of yours which we haven't yet discussed is the string games.

HS: Every few years I get interested in string games, but I don't have all the apparatus for doing it.

JC: Don't you just need a piece of string?

HS: No, no. You need the instructions. I'm writing a book on the subject. Thousands of pages of it are written, but it has to have the references corrected, et cetera.

JC: What is it that you saw in the strings?

HS: Oh, it was some universal thing that seemed to be more widely distributed than anything else in places that didn't have so-called "civilization." It was the only thing that I could isolate off hand that was produced by all primitive societies and by no "cultured" societies. For example, string figures are found everywhere in the world except Europe and Asia, except for a few peripheral areas like the hills in the Philippines and Scotland. None of these places like France, Russia, Japan, China, Turkey have string figures, despite a great interest in games. It is a bit difficult to understand how the same thing is done in Patagonia as is done within the Arctic Circle or the Kalahari Desert without leaving some evidence in Europe and Asia. I've had various theories for that. Possibly it has to do with the parts of the brain that memorize letters (which usually seem to be around thirty or fifty—the things you have to learn to write a language), because string figures don't occur in a place where writing is done. It's a way of tying together a lot of diffuse areas. Unfortunately, there aren't that many good collections. There may be pictures printed, but you have to have the instructions as well.

JC: What do you see in a figure?

HS: It depends on where it's from. Some places make realistic figures. Like the Eskimos make complicated, realistic, asymmetrical figures, whereas most of Micronesia and the Australian figures would be geometrical and are consequently named after flowers and stars and things. The techniques developed in these pieces are

suitable for such geometric figures, while those of the Eskimos are for realistic animals, birds, and people.

JC: I remember that some of the Eskimo strings act out little dramas, like a house falling down and the man running away.

HS: That occurs everywhere. The reason that there is a lot of drama in the ones from the Eskimos is that it was a carefully made collection. Anywhere that a careful collection is made—which would take a number of years to do in any place—there would always be moving figures. The other oddity is that the string is always the same length, no matter where it is, and that only one person does the string figures. Something similar to the string figure, but not in any way connected, is the cat's cradle, which is done all over Europe and Asia. The cat's cradle is a game, while the string figures are essentially pictures of something. They do have many other uses in the cultures concerned. My interest in them was merely as something that a lot of people did who are usually lumped together as being primitive. The distribution of anything else isn't the same—the bow and arrow, pottery, basketry, or clothing—any kind of conceptions. As far as I know, the string figures are the only universal thing other than singing. But singing may exist universally for the same reason: that a lot of experiences are lumped together as songs which probably aren't. Like tonal languages, as in Yoruba, lots of things that were identified as songs turned out to be poetry that is at a certain pitch. Or a Seneca book I have here, which is spoken, but because it's transcribed from a tape recorder, it is possible to indicate what tone each word is sounded on. Because of this possibility of transcriptions from tape recordings it becomes very difficult to determine where speech ended and singing began. It is an artifact of the technical productions of people's vocal chords that classifies certain things as songs, and it may be the same way with string figures. They may have derived from many different sources.

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JC: Another large area of interest to you is occult and magic. You said your parents were involved.

HS: I'm not so interested in that any more. Those things were current during the 1890s. Different types of occult, like supposed secret knowledge handed down, seems to occur only at the end of every hundred years. There is an interest in those things now, but it isn't anything like it was in 1890, and it will probably be bad again until the year 2000. By then, I presume, people will become exhausted attempting to find happiness out of technological means. Then they move on to some other methods, like superstitious and metaphysical means. It's a kind of pendulum that swings. It basically has to do with the contact of large land masses between Europe and Asia, where there is an habitual interest in mechanics and such, probably even prehistorically. In Asia—at least looking from the European standpoint—there is more mystical interest. So it swings back and forth, and the people in between are crushed in the ensuing crusades, flower power riots, or something.

JC: Yes. How do you view what's going on in popular culture the past few years?

HS: I think it would be a good thing if it were to operate. It's the only salvation for society. You see, things still exist where individuals can produce enough food. The population situation hasn't got entirely out of kilter yet. It would seem that the world is going through a kind of disillusionment with machinery, which obviously doesn't work very well. I think that turning back towards individual food production is about necessary. You probably don't believe that, for it is counter to the idea of having a city of the future with rocket ships all over the place and everybody with their own helicopter and taking injections to teach them mathematics. I would prefer to see this technological thing knocked out, because all the things I'm interested in, like singing, poetry, painting, and stuff, can all be done just as well without this large number of can openers, egg beaters, Empire State Buildings, and things. I would like to see

smaller communities that are self-supporting spring up. There was a movement towards that in popular culture—like the Diggers. It seemed to be holding out some hope for the future: a generation growing up disillusioned with the possibility of the hernia cure being universally distributed. It may be healthier to live a life less concentrated—like this terrible problem of living in the city and having to get money to live in the city. I'm trying to found new sciences, to entirely overhaul anthropology and turn it into something else. I have to depend on psychopaths to pay for that kind of research. Unfortunately, the movements like the Diggers have been defeated. What is happening seems bad.

JC: Is it related to what happened in politics last summer? [1968]

HS: Partially. That brought the ideas home a little, although it was also disillusioning that so many apparently intelligent people could have any faith in politics. Yet there was some protest against the general notion of politics. I don't know whether Presidents are elected on the basis of popularity or whether social processes put them in, for the same cycles seem to be gone through for a long time. For a while it seemed to be due to increased communication, and especially getting off the earth seemed to make it possible to have some kind of a worldview. Just the mere fact that you can open *Life* magazine, which I wouldn't advise—though I'd rather look at *Life* than *Sing Out!*—and there's a picture of the Earth taken from the sky. It makes the Amazon and the Congo seem closer. It makes it simpler to think of something like string figures, or, what I'm now interested in—linguistics, mythology—to see those things as units, simply because the Earth literally became smaller. Positive values can be seen in more agrarian-type societies, or whether they are anarchies. Those self-supporting societies have a lot of advantages: diseases don't spread easily from one to the other, et cetera. But I would say that things are probably going to get more strict and anti-those ideas for a while now, until the whole thing blows up.

JC: Can you tell me something about that collection of decorated eggs which occupies a corner of your room?

HS: The eggs are very interesting. There are certain reasons that people make them, but which I don't know precisely.

JC: Do you think it's related to the Seminole patchwork quilts?

HS: No. It's naturally different because the designs are painted on something, whereas the quilts are cut and have other structural possibilities. Something about an egg leads to certain types of thought, evidently, and the same type of eggs have survived for very many years. By chance these thirty people who make them in America were displaced from the Hutzle Hills to camps in Poland, then sent to Germany, and a lot of them came to Canada and this country. These eggs were originally given only to a certain type of dance to help the husband determine which girl he wants to marry. I suppose the people who make them now lost their husbands. It's a psychopathic activity, where a great deal of effort is put into something that can't be sold for anything. Each egg is different—absolutely no two alike—though there are certain basic types. I've been working on the egg thing intently for three years now.

JC: Behind me I see a movie?

HS: I was making a movie of *Mahagonny*.

JC: What is *Mahagonny*?

HS: It is an opera by Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht. I had an hour already of it. You're in it. It's at the Jewish Museum next Tuesday. Also, it's going on a tour of Iran. It's playing in Tokyo.

JC: I see colored dyes over there.

HS: I paint. Well, I'm a painter. I've gone through about twenty thousand eggs and have kept notes on each one. A rotten egg is about the most transient medium. It is about the most difficult thing to paint on. The whole thing is liable to explode violently in your hand at any second. Some of the best ones are made by a lady and her daughter who make about four dozen a year, and it requires all of their time to do that. The eggs and the subject matter on them are connected with the shamanistic religion. I got one that had the rainbows woven into ladders separating the underworld from the upperworld. The number of these eggs that are made keep certain monsters chained up somewhere. This has nothing to do with their function here, which has changed.

JC: Do you find any of those superstitious qualities in the designs from the Seminole?

HS: There are a limited number of Seminoles, and a limited number of ways a piece of cloth can be ripped and put back together, if it is ripped by Seminole measuring methods. Also, the sewing method can only produce certain angles. This type of design—turned at an angle and made of stripes—only developed about 1942, and being that everybody who made this stuff was saving samples—in case they wanted to make the same one again—it was possible to do an archaeology by going through a barrel of stuff one lady had. Without too much effort, it was possible to collect all of the Seminole designs. It is different with the Easter eggs, because they are done in secret, and for sale. Originally they were done by farmers' wives—they probably still are—but now they're made to sell, so the price has gone up, the quality has gone down, and nobody is learning to make them. What I've been interested in are unconscious developments of cosmographic notions that appear on the eggs, so I haven't had to know the people who made them, though I do have a general idea of where they live. One man I did know wasn't very good. He tried to make some because he rented himself out to demonstrate Ukrainian folk art. His eggs were interesting mainly because he classified them. He told me things and gave certain ideas, but he died.

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JC: I'm curious as to why you feel that your recent peyote ceremony recordings from Oklahoma are more important today than the *Anthology of American Folk Music* albums.

HS: Because of the fact that the method of commenting on music has improved. Somehow, the performance of music has to be removed from phonographs and radios and such, because those require a technological development of a high order, and consequently cannot help but suppress somebody. It's better to have people singing, and get more people singing, than to have more radios, as far as music is concerned. Naturally, for information, you

have to get it over the radio or telephone. I wanted to clear that up, why the *Anthology* is outdated.

Generally speaking, philosophy has progressed farther. Everybody knows more regarding the evaluation of abstract ideas, so as much can be got out of listening to radio now as could formerly be got out of listening to records, because it's possible to appreciate things that are closer to you. Previously, the *Anthology* was appreciated as a curiosity. Now people can get involved with a great variety of music. The peyote record is important because it represents some kind of a comparable breakthrough, in that someone was willing to pay for such an elaborate exposition of a very obscure subject. I didn't go to Oklahoma to record the music. I went to make a movie, but got separated—I wanted to collect some kind of data, there was so much around. Most physical objects were too expensive or too large to handle, so it occurred to me to make records, because everyone was singing anyhow.

JC: This was when you were in jail in Anadarko?

HS: No, in the months succeeding that, although the first descriptions that I heard of the peyote ceremony or the signs of it were in the jail. There were many paintings on the jail walls, all over it, even Hopi drawings, certain scenes from the peyote ritual, pictures of the altar. The people in there described it to me. I met a social class that I wasn't familiar with. I never found out exactly the original reason for arresting me. The method of commenting on music is what is important on the peyote album. All the business of reference to books is outdated. I hope the project leads to some sort of understanding of cross-cultural phenomena or something.

JC: How about the whole new inclination of the hippie kids towards Indians and peyote, et cetera.

HS: I hope they buy the records.

JC: Why are they looking in that direction now? You've been doing it for years. Do you feel any connection there?

HS: I saw a picture of Dr. Boas taken in 1880 or '90. He looked exactly like a hippie. He had a pea-coat and a beard. He was twenty-four or twenty-five when he first visited the Kwakiutl. I thought

there might be a connection but there isn't. There always seems to be a recurrent romanticism regarding the Indians. It's due now to the shortage of Buddhist headdresses. I've only occasionally run into any hippies who had much to say about the Indians. For a while they were naming cars after Indians—Pontiac, et cetera—and then there were Indian songs—Buell Kazee singing "Little Mohee." I assume that most people who hold this interest will change, just as at any other time there's a great number of bohemian types interested in art. Fortunately, they don't continue on that form of life, or the government would not have survived as long as it has. I'm designing record covers for The Beatles' new record company. All my projects are only attempts to build up a series of objects that allow some sort of generalizations to be made regarding popularity of visual or auditory themes.

JC: In other words, you're just presenting the material from which someone else can draw their own conclusions?

HS: I hope to live long enough—if I survive this interview—to devote my declining years to writing about these things. I want to make sure of some points. It doesn't look like I'll make it, though. I'm leaving it to the future to figure out the exact purpose of having all these rotten eggs, the blankets, the Seminole patchwork I never look at, and records that I never listen to. However, it's as justifiable as anything that can be done, as any other type of research, and is probably more justifiable than more violent types, like fighting with somebody or becoming an export banker. It is a way of fooling away the time, harmlessly, as much as possible. It's like a nonviolent thing. If somebody comes in and wants to become violent, I warn them about the five thousand dollars worth of rotten eggs which are liable to explode. There's to be no violence around here.

JC: To me, your movies fall in the realm of art, while the records are concerned with things between popular and folk culture.

HS: Movies are a different thing. They're a technological thing, more than music is. Anybody who listens to music can buy a guitar for eight dollars and learn to play it and sing with the thing, at least sufficiently to please themselves and a few friends; whereas, to

make movies of the same subject is ridiculous, nobody would do it. So naturally my movies are made as a kind of final gesture towards film. They've just about run their course. There's no reason to have movies any more, life is much more horrible and adventurous and everything. Movies are sort of a sin. It's connected with graven images, looking at films or any type of art. My films are more or less educational. I've never done much with them as far as elucidating what the subject matter is, but they are like the basic rhythms that are in music. It's also a way of making money, more than Folkways Anthologies, which are a financial loss. I spend millions on these things, and though they never pay for themselves, the films do give a little money. I don't want to make those things to entertain other people unless it is fairly costly. Some of my films are the most expensive ever made. One that is on the floor is eight minutes long, and it cost over a million dollars. Of course, a lot of money was misappropriated by my partner.

JC: You have said that popular trends are immediately satisfying.

HS: Any kind of popular trend is infinitely more wholesome than listening to old records and trying to institute changes. It's more important that people know that some kind of pleasure can be derived from things that are around them, rather than to catalog more stuff. You can do that forever, and if people aren't going to have a reason to change, they're never going to change. Any kind of evidence can be presented. It's like a political move—that's important. These little things like studying history or ancient stones also have to go, along with the phonograph, radio, and television, if there is going to be any real development of music or human happiness, probably. It's a mistake that Herbert Hoover made—that notion that you can manufacture things forever and that there's always an endless market, because there isn't. It's a crucial point in history, the last chance where the population can have an agrarian base to it. They won't be able to do that in a hundred years. I don't think people should spend too much time fiddling with old records. It's better to switch on the radio. I don't think that you can say that folk culture was doing such and such, and that in popular culture

these things became disseminated, although I used to think that that was the case. I now believe that the dissemination of music affects the quality. As you increase the critical audience of any music, the level goes up.

JC: Doesn't it also go down, because it has to appeal to a more divergent range of people?

HS: I don't think they're that divergent. There isn't that much difference between one person and another.

JC: This represents a change in attitudes in yourself over the years since the *Anthology*.

HS: Certainly. I was just fiddling with those ideas then, but they were current at that time. Everything is computerized now. You wouldn't dare bring out such a thing as the *Anthology* now, for it first has to be analyzed for how many C-sharps there are, et cetera.

JC: Then how do you feel about art?

HS: That's such a specialized technique of the so-called West that I don't think it's very relevant. If people were sufficiently busy, they wouldn't have any time for it. Painting—it's a ridiculous thing. It's a bad habit, like too many laxatives. There are a lot of bad things in European civilization, and that's one of them. The idea of easel painting—I've been driven to it by adversity. I couldn't be a railroad section hand, so I took up easel painting. I'm pretty sure there have always been things like people dressing up in Indian clothes. It's a romanticism of a sort to be followed by something else when this dies down. I would say it hasn't much association with the Indians, other than that everybody is now more sympathetic to the Indians. After all, their grandparents were murdering millions of them. I suppose that children dressed up like Saracens during the Crusades, and when Genghis Khan was coming, they all dressed up in Genghis Khan suits. It's all the same—Marie Antoinette was sitting around in a stable built out of solid gold. It's the same as they do now. It's a way of evading the catastrophe that overtook the Indians, and an attempt to irritate parents, relieve guilt, and other things all at once. Probably that particular concatenation occurs in every society periodically, unless they get too smart and blow it up—no more

Indians or nothing. Already through the tobacco they have given everybody lung cancer. They're killing people off rapidly with that. A few more of these beads slung around heads—no way to tell what effect it's really having. And when my records come out—like, curtains!

JC: What do you mean—"like, curtains?"

HS: I'm just trying to be funny for the sake of the readers. I wish I'd stuck on the business about Engels pointing out the relation between machine and thought. The reason for looking at objects is to perfect the self. It's a kind of selfish thing.



Photo by John Palmer, 1970

P. Adams Sitney—NYC

On June 3, 1977, P. Adams Sitney interviewed Harry Smith on his monthly Arts Forum program on WNYC-FM. It was to have been the first of three interviews; however, the station terminated the plan because of negative public response to the initial program.

—Film Culture

HS: Visionary cinema is confused with film. The only preliminary thing I would like to say is that I assume that the radio audience is familiar with the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss regarding the Stop sign and the Go sign, the raw and the cooked (animals being cooked and eaten by men). I would particularly suggest page ninety-six, and then you can throw away *The Raw and the Cooked*. A knowledge of Noam Chomsky is also necessary. Chomsky's *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* should be looked at, at least. It's his doctoral thesis, and probably the most brilliant one Harvard has had since 16-something. Then, of course, the listener should know a little about Wittgenstein. In that case it's not necessary to take the cellophane off the book before you throw it away.

You should ask some questions, but please explain first that the answers have no connection with the questions unless the up and down is binom...binomially...(mispronunciations being the raw/cooked part). As a matter of fact, as you leave your home tonight, examine the fire hydrants to see if they are still painted red and green the same way they were.

PS: I find the bibliography puzzling, but perhaps some will find it illuminating. I would like you to tell us about the work you have been doing on your film *Mahagonny*, the principles upon which you have been making it, and the way in which you plan to exhibit it.

HS: Jung's theories regarding synchronicity have recently turned out to be true. For a long time it was thought that Jung was merely some kind of shill that had been placed there just to see exactly how far the public would go in belief. But now empirical proofs have arrived from the University of California. I can't go into that. Get the latest issue of *The Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* (April 1976), and you will find out that what you believed was going to happen, happened. For example, this evening Professor Sitney thought we were going to be late, and he arranged it perfectly.

PS: Yes, we were a little late getting to the studio. I see we are having a very easy time getting off the subject.

HS: *Mahagonny*? We just did it. The theory of *Mahagonny* is the three interacting with the four: as we all know, three times four is twelve, and three plus four is seven; so consequently there are twenty-two songs. The first lines being, "Wanted: fugitives from Justice, the widow Begbick, Fatty the bookkeeper (or is the word translated 'procurer?'), and Trinity Moses." If my listeners have been following the Mideastern situation lately, they will understand why Trinity Moses later impersonates God, when they realize how there was a war between the Mohammedans and the Jews, which turned into them uniting against the Christians. That's the raw/cooked thing carried to the second binomial juncture.

The first lines being "Wanted," the last lines—after it goes through things like: "You can sponge his face with vinegar, but you cannot help a dead man, you can cut out his tongue, but you cannot help a dead man,"—the final lines are, "There is no hope for you, or ourselves, or anyone." Careful examination of the film *The Harder They Come* would be necessary. The only person in that film who is not Jamaican is the recording engineer, who is Oriental.

PS: The connection between your film *Mahagonny* and *The Harder They Come* escapes me.

HS: Well, we're hoping to open the film in Zurich. I think that will explain the connection, it being more important to live *Mahagonny* than to see *Mahagonny*. It is constructed on all sides. The first thing that happens is, of course, the personification of the widow Begbick as the Three, as opposed to the Four. The Three being money, sex, and, as it says, whiskey ("Show me the way to the [next] whiskey bar"). But in the original, it's "Show me the way to the next pretty boy." The widow Begbick is running brothels from the place where they are in Florida at that point "with the desert ahead and the sheriff behind." Trinity Moses represents money ("the next little dollar"). This is then compounded with four things, which I will tell you later.

PS: What will be the imagery?

HS: Imagery never exists as such. It's determined by what people are told the image is going to be. There's a very interesting study of how people look at a picture. In this case, Hokusai's *Wave* is taken, and the first forty-six scans more or less follow the picture of the wave as it breaks over Fuji. The last forty-six scannings are of a random nature, regarding what the individual desires. Now, these studies will demonstrate what is printed on the screen. The book *Eye Movements and Psychological Processes* [ed. Richard A. Monty, John W. Senders, 1976] goes into the fact that if there is a picture of some people going into a door while others are sitting at a table, and now if the words "How much money do they have?" are said or printed, the eyes move over the clothing or the furniture. But, naturally, if the question is "How old are they?" people look at the faces. "What do they work at?" They maybe look at the hands. The fact is that the fovea cuts out most of what we see and that the brain constructs an image out of almost nothing (which is, of course, why Hypatia was dragged onto an altar and her flesh scraped off with seashells). Because when one of the people I mentioned earlier was proved to be real, naturally the whole world became real. Otherwise, we would be afraid of falling through the floor and going to China. People don't like that; it's an eight-thousand-mile jump.

In *Mahagonny*, four different images are being projected at once, more or less as a commentary on Duchamp's *Large Glass*. In the

showing of *Mahagonny*, people's passions are played upon. I have made a close examination of the tables in the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, where the questions are classified according to, let us say, verbal root, or nominal roots—although this time—oh, never mind. Gladys Reichard pointed out long ago that in languages as divergent as Navajo and Indo-European (of course, Edward Sapir cut her throat for that) the word *sun*, referring to the thing in the sky, has a different connotation (in one case, it being connected with redness and blood, à la the Pampas of Argentina)—I think you are not very far from a fool, Professor Sitney. There is just this microphone between us. That is connected with a joke regarding going to Little Rock: "Well, I don't know how to get there, but there's a hell of a big one down in the field of Aunt Martha's."

PS: Will there be words projected on the screen in your film?

HS: There are a number of words. They were made by a number of people. Although basically the ones I'm using were done by Mason Hoffenberg. Word frequency counts have been made of things like Mayan, the Enochian words in *The Calls of the Thirty Aethers* that Dr. Dee wrote down in the window seat while Sir Edward Kelley looked into the Olmec mirror. There are a number of other cases where words that were automatically compounded by automatic machinery are being projected. Of course, anything that happens to have twenty-two forms in it is being projected on other screens. There are basically five movie projectors and about twelve slide projectors. That is why we are moving to Switzerland; it has more electricity than anywhere else.

The major screen is a boxing ring from the original set of *Mahagonny*—that's from "The Little Mahagonny" that was given along with some things by Schoenberg, Hindemith, etc., I believe, at Baden-Baden, perhaps in 1923. The twenty-two statements by the announcer will, of course, be translated into some language or other. Then the twenty-one forms of death that are in the *Codex Laud*, which, along with the *Liverpool Codex*, was brought back from Poland by Dr. Dee and Sir Edward Kelley (it contains things like a

man shot in the eye). And then, of course, the Tarot cards will be included. I have recently been fortunate enough to see Robert Wang's paintings, that have taken him so many years to make for Israel Regardie, of the cards for the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. They are being made public for the first time on one of the screens.

The original set of *Mahagonny* had a boxing ring with a pool table in the middle of it and some chairs. In our case it was more expedient to put the boxing ring against the wall, and put the four pool tables under the boxing ring so that they could all be lit independently. The boxing ring itself should be lit from behind. As much as possible, the general Expressionist mode of constructing features has been followed. But due to the fact that everyone in my listening audience merely considers Expressionism to be second-rate drawing, we had to add a little of Claes Oldenburg, Jim Rosenquist, and so forth.

PS: Some years ago, you projected for me excerpts from *Mahagonny* on a single projector, masked by a series of gels. The imagery seemed to alternate between pictures of people, animation, outdoor scenes, and interiors. What relation would that version have to your present plans?

HS: Of course, over the past decade a large number of projections of *Mahagonny* have been made under various circumstances. That particular one was experimenting with shape in relation to response. The best response to the film, as Professor Sitney knows, is if the audience goes to sleep. It's really been successful. They have entered into the film fully. That particular projection apparatus still exists, with the gels and things; however, it is being done differently at this point. With the four screens being used, naturally, instead of having to block off the lower left-hand corner when the words "look out" are printed in Urdu or something, we merely black one screen out. However, a certain amount of masking is being used to get horizontal or diagonal groups of things.

Any one reel is made up of twenty-four units in palindrome form: P.A.S.A.N.A.S.A.P., and so on. Every other scene is animation, A. Every first scene on a reel is people, P, then animation, and then

something like a generalized image, *S*, as opposed to a portrait, which is really what *P* stands for, and then an animation, and then a nature scene of some sort, *N*, such as photographing the Morgan Bank to get the pockmarks made when the milk-wagon blew up loaded with dynamite. (They still get nervous despite the fact that there are no anarchists around. They get nervous on Wall Street. They began closing bronze doors at the mere sight of a camera.) There are twenty-four shots in each of twelve reels, adding up to two gross or two hundred and eighty-eight shots.

I hope your listeners realize at this point why I wanted to edit this tape. I was dragged out of bed. Some idiot, that I hope the Mighty Sparrow writes a song about, had taken my "reds" and wouldn't give them back until six o'clock. I took so much speed at noon that I just hope the program is over soon.

The main object of those mask shots was to get light behind individual images that you looked at. Long, long ago in 1950-something, I gave an elaborate light show—it was 1956 or something, I don't know when, in Steinway Hall. I originally projected slides around what some idiot, not realizing that the number 12 is somehow equivalent to heaven and earth, called *Heaven and Earth Magic*. They're always unable to accept numbers. That's only natural, because once you begin to study numerology, every number has a meaning. So it breaks down entirely, except for the number 18, for which I can't figure anything, except film number 118, which is a postcard-size film, which disappeared about 1830. Oh, where was I? Yes, it will be the first time the Matterhorn has had an active eruption for years.

PS: Are you saying that your film will make the Matterhorn erupt?

HS: Now you're doing it. So that the experiments that were done earlier with colored light in relation to motion are really very close to some very interesting drawings I've seen recently that were made by Schiller and Goethe, examining a color wheel and getting differential impressions. It's funny how that once the behaviorists—and Gardner Murphy, if you're listening to your radio, forgive me, but you were nasty to me when I was a conscientious objector,

and I won't forgive you—got off that. It has now come back to, like, red does mean a more violent activity than green. You know, it is different to get "red in the face" than it is to "have the blues."

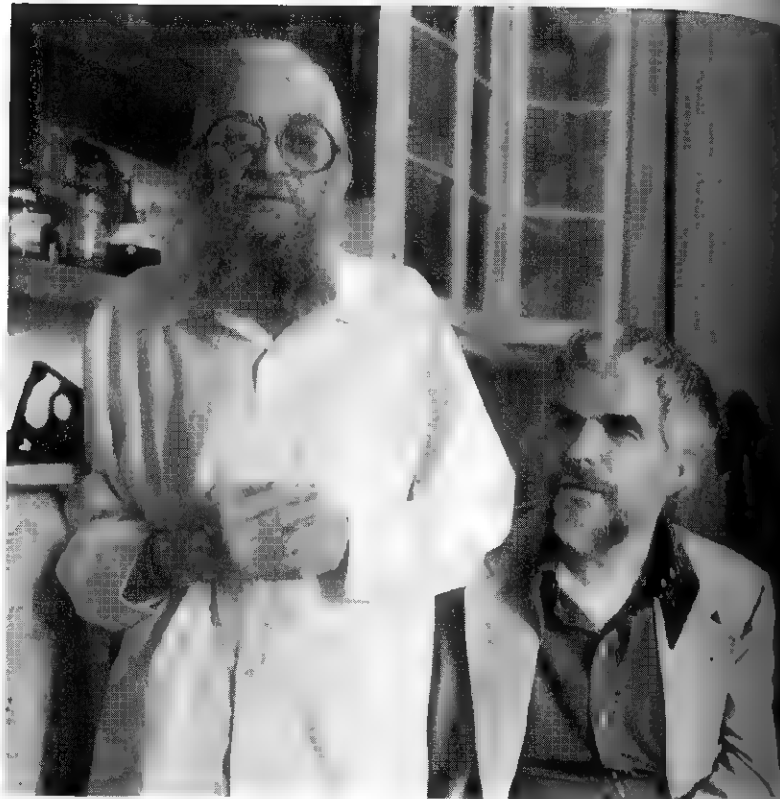
Mahagonny has required all of my energy, many hundred thousand dollars. At this point it is running about two thousand a month just to keep going, with no food or clothing allowed out of these two thousand dollars, I'd like to add. And the rent is always behind. It's funny what it gets spent on.

A peculiar little book on Goethe has recently come out, listing all the translations of Faust. His main things revolve around the problem: Is it I that is looking at the thing, or is it the thing which is projecting itself to me? This, of course, is again why Hypatia was scraped to death as she was riding her chariot on her way to her father's, Plotinus's, school. The point is that Plato's notion that the eye projected a beam that went, in this case, through the electric light beam and to a variety of other places, while we believe that it is something else that lights the room. This is again the problem Goethe had. (The only reason I mention Faust is that the United Nations publishes an odd little book at this point, for something like twenty-three dollars, that lists, I think, eighteen hundred versions of Faust, translated from, e.g., Armenian into Welsh.) Goethe goes over that same business in his argument with Newton, or later with his business about the plant: Is it I that is looking at the colors, or are the colors shining on me? Is it I that differentiates the signature of one plant from another, or is it the plant that determines the signature? The relationship between the *is*, *was*, and *will be* comes in here, the *is* being so infinitely small, and both the *was* and *will* being constructed out of projections of the other one, the future being a construction of the past, and the past being an attempt to correlate what is sometimes perceived as the *now* with a way of operating in the future. I don't know! What P. Adams wants me to do is ask for money. Well, I won't. So I don't have much to say about *Mahagonny*, except that I'm making it in my autumn years. I've been cooked enough! The leaves are falling off!

Four screens are to be used, and rhythmic patterns will occur between the length of the scenes. The general form of twenty-four interlocked shots is the same, backwards and forwards. Individuals in the audience will have their attention directed to one particular part of the counterpoint at each minute. Peter Kubelka wanted to open it in Vienna: "You can use my castle and my Steenbeck!" But I was afraid they'd understand German there. The whole point of *Mahagonny* is to translate not the story, which is trivial—it's handled much better in *Happy End*—but to translate Brecht's indecision. For you must understand that although a lot of people think that Brecht was a Communist, it wasn't exactly that way. He was caught in the middle, where he either had to jump along with the Nazis or he had to jump along with the Communists. There wasn't any dream king like Ludwig II drowning himself. One of the best examples of cooking something is the column that runs up the main stairwell in the ridiculous castle that Lufthansa Airways now makes just a tiny airshot. God, what a fantastic piece of marble carved like a papyrus or something tied together, going up to blue things among stars and I don't know.... All these questions can be looked up in a book called *Theatrum Vitae Humanae* by J. J. Boissard [Metz, 1596]. The original decision was to translate an opera into an occult experience. And I hope Professor Sitney now understands the relation of occlusion to sleep. Or why one should sleep through movies. In this case, you can't do it if you come to *Mahagonny*! What was that play Ludwig did in which he flooded the theater? Of course, D'Annunzio did it in one of his plays, but that was mere chance. There was a war scene, and bombs were being set off. The theater filled with smoke. The audience rioted, but fortunately at that moment, he writes in his diary, a cannon blew a hole in the wall, and they escaped from the stage. It's just the same old stunt. It's just like the Globe Theater, only we're electrifying it this time.

I have to talk to Andy Berler of CAPS, because I was supposed to finish *Mahagonny* by April Fools' Day. The public service contract has not been fulfilled. Well, the point is, Mary and Andy, if you hear

this, the greatest public service that I could have pulled at the time was to disappear, and I did it! After twelve years I moved out of the Chelsea Hotel to a secret location on the Lower East Side, or some side. My public service is to leave people alone and have them leave me alone, and to work on the most elaborate mathematical tables regarding *Mahagonny*. I would like to say that anyone I know or have ever seen or am likely to meet is going to be excluded. They are not, after the way they treated me, are treating me, or they're going to treat me, going to be allowed to see anything that will give them happiness. No! I'm saving it for things like *Playboy*, no-good tinkings of Bolivia that have been having special tablecloths woven for thirty years. They are the ones that can see it. If Barbara Hutton is alive, she can see it, and that's it!



*Photo by Allen Ginsberg, 1988—courtesy Fahey/Klein Gallery.
Harry Smith with Stan Brakhage*

Dawn Michelle Baude—Boulder, Colorado

DB: What interests me about your work is its spiritual aspect. I've read your films from that perspective, and I wanted to know what kind of occultism you were exposed to when you were growing up.

HS: Well, I would say that the books that were lying around the house were basically Theosophical.

DB: So your parents were Theosophists?

HS: To a degree. They were very eclectic in their religious activities. For example, I went to a great number of different Sunday schools, so I got a great number of religions, although my parents did rely on the more ecstatic ones that would have rooms in the church basement where you could roll on the floor.

DB: And froth.

HS: And so forth. There was a lot of chicanery to it. On the other hand, I got some idea of the pageantry—but I don't believe any of the theology of the Catholic church. I mean, that's influenced me quite a bit. The ceremonies of the Catholic church must be beautiful, and you know, in 1300 or so it was...

DB: Magical at that point.

HS: Yes, it was the answer to rural life. My grandfather was Catholic and had a big collection of liturgy. My grandmother was a friend of people like Annie Besant and Bishop Leadbeater [Charles Webster Leadbeater].

DB: Bishop Leadbeater? Really?

HS: Yes! He sent me a magazine that I've never been able to trace down more copies of called *Wee Wisdom*...

DB: *Wee Wisdom*?

HS: A Theosophical magazine for children, I believe. Henry Miller gave me a sense of *The Secret Doctrine* by Madame Blavatsky, various things, Presbyterians, stages of Krishnamurti, who I suppose you'll get to...yet the form of these things seems to me to be completely chaotic. The Bishop had a cat that was the backwards reincarnation of the entire Theosophical Society.

DB: I know! It gets very twisted, doesn't it?

HS: Well, Annie was gone, of course. The Bishop referred to her as being "on the threshold of divinity." She had already been people like Christ and Leonardo di Vinci and a variety of other people. I would say that the books of Kandinsky and the paintings of Rudolph Bauer were important. Does anybody ever hear of Rudolph Bauer?

DB: I know Kandinsky, but I don't know Bauer. Is he a Theosophist?

HS: I don't know, I'm sure he...well, he sort of out-Kandinsky'd Kandinsky, but due to his relationship to Hilla Rebay, Bauer was sort of hated, because Hilla spent a lot of money, and one of the first things they did was rent an entire floor toward the top of the Plaza Hotel, then arranged the stuff in the order it was supposed to be in. My interests in occultism at that point were more in the practical applications that Kandinsky, in the two books or so, wrote about. The axe and the square and the circle and the triangle. Now who got me interested in the modern occult movements? There were some people who had a bookstore, Billy and Mary Goine, and they'd sit at the same table at the cafe, The Black Cat, with Aleister Crowley and Somerset Maugham, and various things they told me would shock people, so I don't want to put it on tape.

DB: Too bad. I was thinking of Kandinsky and Klee's palette when I was watching *Early Abstractions*, and I was wondering if the colors were symbolic of spiritual states, or is that too much—you

know how the Theosophists have all those charts with colors and shapes.

HS: Yes, there's a mythology, but there's more than thirty glorious colors of reality. Incidentally, those three paintings at the end of *Thought-Forms*, I've forgotten who the three composers are, you know, where the stuff bubbles out of the cathedral.

DB: Mozart is one.

HS: And Bach is one, and the third is Scriabin. Those were, with no doubt, the first paintings that more or less were fully removed from what we might call "realistic" painting, a specialized way we have of viewing reality, which isn't very good in a lot of ways. In some book or another, there's—never mind! I've seen it myself! When you get off a railway train or whatever, and arrive in a strange town, it's complete confusion. And that flat kind of painting, before Raphael, really resembles the confusion more than a perspective drawing. For example, the main street in Boulder, Colorado—a postcard doesn't really get you to a place that sells cigarettes, but it might get you to plenty of places that sell carrot juice!

DB: But in *Early Abstractions*, the colors...

HS: The colors were based on colors that were available. They're not necessarily "occult" colors, they're just the basic colors. And after all, we are experiencing an illusion of a psychedelic nature at this very moment! We're high on something. Starches figure very heavily in the production of this particular illusion.

DB: Oh no! When I was watching *Early Abstractions*, I kept thinking about Pythagoreanism and numerology and the Qabalah. Were those concerns at the time you were making those films?

HS: No, I don't believe so. I was thinking more coercion and, to a degree, Chinese art.

DB: Mandalas? Tankas?

HS: Yes. Tibetan painting figured in my life for a long time—or the Chinese style. I insisted on dressing in Chinese attire until I had to go to school. I can remember weeping and wailing. And I had all these Chinese things laid out. I would put robes on. And I had a

couple of dolls. There were pictures from *National Geographic* that later turned out to be Tibetan.

DB: So were you getting Buddhism or Taoism when you were growing up?

HS: I haven't trusted writers on Taoism, until this doctor—whatever his name, Chao!—who writes a book on the Tao and sells Chang's long-life tea from a recipe of his grandfather's. He traces his genealogy back to whoever wrote *The Yellow Record* and peddles his tea in San Francisco, but his book on Taoism is sure an eye-opener. He ends up with a very careful analysis of the *I Ching* and says anybody who uses this for divination has just missed the point totally and entirely. Signs are to be meditated on, but never used to indicate the future. Naturally, he also goes into T'ai Chi very carefully. He goes into animal exercises that are very close to how an American Indian thinks, so if you stretch your arms out you'll be a bird.

DB: Or if you crouch down, you'll be a frog. In *Early Abstractions*, the music...

HS: Well, the music was changed around many, many times. They were first meant to be silent, married to two rhythms, one for the heart, and one for the respiration, so the rhythms would lock in. I think they're thirteen and seventy-two, I'd have to look it up, but as one ages, one's anatomy—one must adjust the figures slightly. I think it's thirteen and seventy-two, and those are both important occult numbers.

DB: Right.

HS: True knowledge of things like the Zohar and Pythagoreanism, and such like stuff, basically came either from the Goines, or someone named—Lionel Ziprin's grandfather [Rabbi Naftali Zvi Margolies Abulafia]. Personally, it's through the Qabalah. For example, the peculiar way the Qabalah operates is—I had been given some shoes, supposedly from the head of the Rosicrucians of Belgium. When I got to New York, I put the shoes on and walked and walked, and rang a doorbell, and it was these two people, Lionel

and Joanne, who just got married, and not even their parents knew where they were, but the shoes had gone there. They brought me to see the Goines. There was a lady who used to hang around named Dorothy La Bour, and at one point she said, "Well, I think it's time to get Count Walewski." I didn't realize—you see, Dorothy was a very strange person. She traveled for many years with Gurdjieff.

DB: Right! I knew the name.

HS: Oh, I've never been much interested in that [Gurdjieff], too many papers, although I've made motion pictures of the dancing, which was quite impressive. But yes, she traveled around and also, interestingly enough, was also a close friend of Nikola Tesla, who one year made experiments on...

DB: Physics. Tesla's in revival right now.

HS: Well, he invented the alternating current that made everything possible. His major early experiments were on the top of Pike's Peak. Tesla's big because they suddenly realized that he invented everything. He slept on a windowsill and thought his existence was connected with a certain bird who came to the terrace at the Versailles Hotel, which is where he lived, and that he would die when the bird died. And sure enough.

DB: Wow. That's a real totemic...

HS: So a lot of people turned against Tesla. Edison is, of course, an archenemy. The alternating current can kill people much more easily than direct current, and Edison built his machinery on direct current, but he was as crazy as Tesla. On his way home from the laboratory, Edison would stop to shake hands with hundreds of people that weren't there, but he thought he saw. He was totally tone-deaf and played the organ every day for a few hours, and X-rayed a marble statue of Diana, and at the same time of his death was working on an extract of sunflower oil, that when applied to a certain part of the brain, increased its ability by three million times. That's because he thought these advancements—yes, they were advancements—were coming from little people who lived in his head. Now, of course, the existence of these homunculi, who have been demon-

strated, particularly by Robert Penfield, at the Montreal Neurology Center, and...

DB: What? I don't know that—what you just mentioned.

HS: Great. I hit something you didn't know. But I also presumed that the colors were in some way automatically built-in, like to be "red in the face" is entirely different from being "green with envy" or "having the blues." Colors are very peculiar because they are the intermediary. Most of the colors are vices, such as the color wheel and the circle of colors. Those are all Schiller's and Goethe's inventions, strangely enough.

DB: Right. Schiller and Goethe were both working on that. So when you were making *Early Abstractions*, were you thinking of what these colors do to the body or the mind? I mean, obviously you were, because when I was watching your film *Early Abstractions*, I was thinking, "There's a story here" in the way that the colors and shapes and numbers move together. I was wondering what you were thinking when you were making the...

HS: I think that's a function of, as Wittgenstein says, "The world is always the case." Red is red and yellow is yellow. Purity in the earth realm—I had never thought of that. It requires a great examination of the colors to see if they are pure or not. What I meant to say is, whether they have corruption in them, like that lipstick you're wearing.

DB: All Day Starlit Pink?

HS: Is that what it's called?

DB: Yes. All Day Starlit Pink.

HS: I'd be careful of that. I notice certain little things like that. If you think of psychiatrists' wives, who most often use brighter reds as their lipstick—I'm not making jokes, truly...

DB: No, I was just wondering...

HS: They wear lighter powder and redder lipstick. Some kind of contrast. By the way [pointing to notebook], is that your handwriting?

DB: Yes.

HS: I'm also a handwriting expert, and I'm leaving!

DB: Wait! This was scribbled in the dark while your films were playing. I wasn't even able to see what I was writing. This is regular writing.

HS: That's what I'm afraid of.

DB: I'm going to move on to *Heaven and Earth Magic*. Now, what I noticed in there was the Rosicrucians. Certainly there are so many Egyptian symbols. Do you have any affiliation with either...

HS: King Tut? Oh my, yes. You know if you deal with people like art—it was my parents' fault. Naturally, Tutankhamen's tomb being discovered in 1923, the year I was born, my early childhood was—you have no idea. Everything was in Egyptian style. I particularly think of the masses of jewelry. And what is that around your neck, the Nubian mode?

DB: It's a replica of a pendant from a Nubian pharaoh's necklace.

HS: I've already said that. Nubian is a type of bronze casting. I've always found Egyptian art to be very beautiful, although I have a tendency to consider the Egyptians feeble-minded.

DB: Because?

HS: There's a lack of humanity in their writing. There's no real colloquial literature, whereas the Babylonians can make you laugh and cry alternately. The earliest Akkadian—about the same time as the Nubian period in Egypt—their literature seems so much more realistic to me, but that may be because I got interested in it. In our high school a play was put on that had an Egyptian theme and everybody wore Egyptian dress. Egypt permeated society, the same way our life today is permeated with ecological disaster, sort of what everybody thinks about. Not that I've run into anyone who thinks about it. But I'm sure they do.

The Egyptian city of death was somehow in vogue because of the large number of peculiarities that surrounded the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb. You know, on the last day they had the license to dig, they found it. Ed Sanders thinks that's really because

Carter had broken in and looted the place, and it may be that way. It was chaos in the first room, but never mind about that.

DB: Well, tell me, when a viewer is watching *Heaven and Earth Magic*, did you have in mind a symbolic interpretation? I kept thinking, "This is a story and I can follow it." I was just wondering what was going through your mind when you were putting those images together in a particular order.

HS: I would say it was done by collecting all the available images. In other words, they were in glassine envelopes that were arranged—the first one was an amoeba. It was to be much longer. The backgrounds and things had all been made for the Flood, and all kinds of fantastic animals from Noah's Ark. It was never shot. I utilized the pattern of dreaming. So little is known about dreaming. If you go in at a very deep level and find out what a person really dreams, it's sort of like the symbols of the symbols. At the time, I would sleep—it was very exhausting work—and when I got tired, I'd sleep, then I'd try to put it in the movie. Maybe not in the same form, but let's say I used what I had dreamed. My sleep patterns were completely haywire. I'd sleep for two hours, work for fifteen, then sleep for eighteen hours, and work for two days. So the same material of the dreams is used, but at a different level of interpretation. My feeling about that film—about all my films—is that at this point they're in desperate need of editing. Some change has perhaps taken place in the time, in the tempo we listen to music or live, or this, that, and the other, and they could be helped by being cut down, although the audiences here have been the most attentive, I believe, that I've ever had. I'm more interested in things as they exist now than in their formative stage, because the viewing of the films seems to me hard to prove that you were there. You can be given a pencil and a piece of paper and you can write forever, and arriving at even the symbols of Shambhala logic would never allow you back to *then*. In that sense the film doesn't exist. I think *Heaven and Earth Magic* is too long.

DB: But I kept having the experience that we were going through deeper and deeper layers of story, coming through the layers as you

were speaking of layers of dreams, stories about stories, symbols about symbols. It was an alchemical story, essentially, for me.

HS: Yes, by that point, when that film was made, I had already tried a number of alchemical experiments. I had a magic circle drawn in ink that glowed under ultraviolet light on the floor, and all kinds of glass chemicalware and...

DB: So did you actually do it? Did you try?

HS: Of course! But I never got good results unless I'd taken peyote or other drugs. [to Diane di Prima] Dawn's asking all these questions that essentially I don't think have much to do with the thing. I was invited here to talk about Surrealism.

DB: I'm moving from film to film. I'm moving up to there.

HS: Because all my speeches, or elocutionary exercises, are supposed to be on Surrealism, and as I tried to explain the other day, Surrealism is a state of mind that everybody both has and hasn't. I do believe in some creative force. I hesitate to call it "God," because that's too limiting.

DB: So have you made a study of psychology?

HS: There's no subject I haven't studied.

DB: What were your influences there?

HS: Due to my own inability to cope with the world, I cannot find solutions. It's as if the language was built incorrectly for discussing the subjects that I really want to discuss.

DB: I see. So when you were making *Late Superimpositions*, there was an extraordinary synchronicity between layers. Was that Surrealist chance?

HS: It is totally through chance. There was no attempt at all to synchronize, although it was impossible not to remember that this part was light over the top, so the next time around, I'd vary it and put the light at the bottom and the dark up there, but there was no attempt at all. I think the entire film was run through four times: once in Oklahoma, once on Ninth Street [NYC], part at Dorothy Rice's house, where the beads...

DB: The pearls.

HS: They were fake! You know, it was just run through arbitrarily. But as I said in the preliminary remarks before the showing, we need a whole new vocabulary, a whole new artificial language has to be devised.

DB: So what were you reaching for that you couldn't find?

HS: No, no. I was just—Sir Isaac Newton invented one of the best artificial languages. He spent most of his time working on alchemy, you know.

DB: Yes, Frances Yates goes into that.

HS: If you saw that book *The Hunting of the Greene Lyon* from Cambridge University Press [Betty Jo Teeter Dobbs, 1975] they say that the Sotheby catalogue will forever remain the primary source on the Newton manuscript. People bought alchemy books and then tried to keep other people from finding them.

DB: Right. The great cover-up.

HS: A large number of them were bought in Israel, which I thought was interesting. Sir Geoffrey Keynes has tried to make an annotated version of the Sotheby catalogue. Anyhow, he also devised an artificial language and other stuff. There's a history of artificial languages published by the University of Toronto. They're very strange. All language is peculiar. In Sanskrit, for example, there are no words which contain real substantiality. The whole philosophy is based on things being illusory in nature, that language itself is constructed in such a way that it formulates ideas like two sides of the same coin. There's no concept of real solidity like this table, which I prefer to imagine is solid.

DB: Although the findings of physics tell us that the table is mostly empty space. The closer you look...

HS: Although the standard physicist, once he's slammed his finger in a car door, will admit the substantiality of the car door. Any further questions?

DB: What about your feelings in terms of archetypes?

HS: Well, I tend to think of archetypes as a Jungian concept. There's no doubt that I was reading Jung and got over into what you think of as occult literature.

DB: After *Heaven and Earth Magic*, where do the films go?

HS: Well, I began making films of situations that would probably cause trouble, about people going insane and so forth. The last one that I made—I guess two years ago—it's on string figures. I can't go into all this, except that I would like to mention Kandinsky's painting.

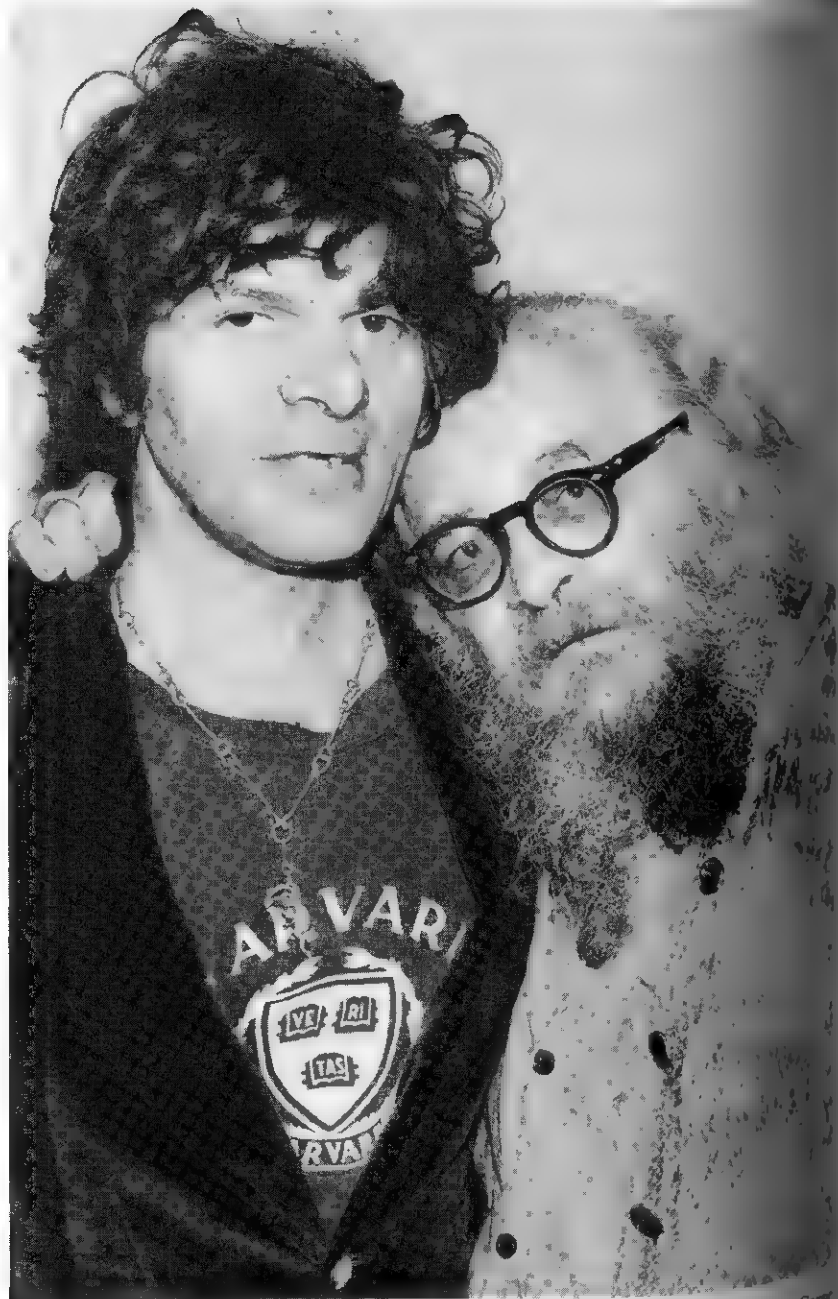


Photo by Gerard Malanga, 1974. Harry Smith with Gregory Corso

A. J. Melita—Chelsea Hotel, NYC

Telephone call

AJ: Does Harry Smith still live...

Operator: Yes.

AJ: Is it possible for me to speak to him?

HS: Hello.

AJ: Is this Harry Smith?

HS: Yes.

AJ: The filmmaker? Hello.

HS: Well, I can hardly be classed as a filmmaker.

AJ: Well, no, what I'm calling about is I'm taking a course at NYU on the avant-garde film...

HS: Uh-huh.

AJ: ...and I have to do a paper. And we saw one of your films, *Heaven and Earth Magic*, and I thought that I would like to do something about you and I was just wondering if I could speak to you.

HS: You don't know what you're up against. I mean—remember that—I mean, you know...

AJ: No, I mean, see, I know absolutely nothing about you really, except...

HS: Well, I just took some speed, for example, and I'm gonna smoke some marijuana, and then I'm gonna take my last dollar and go out and buy some records, and then I'll—well, I don't know. What kind of music do you listen to?

AJ: Jazz classical...

HS: What do you mean "jazz classical?"

AJ: ...and classical.

HS: What do you include in jazz?

AJ: Well, I don't buy records. I listen to the radio, and...

HS: Because I'm in a big record-buying thing now. But what do you define jazz as? Buddy Bolden, Ornette Coleman? I mean...

AJ: Yeah, old jazz, you know classical, old jazz. You know, like Dixieland and the new, freer jazz, I guess. You know. More undefined. I mean, just what I get on the radio I listen to, you know.

HS: Yeah, because I've got to find somebody that knows something about what is called soul music, and I can't find anybody.

AJ: Well, I'm sure there's a lot of people.

HS: I know. There's a bunch of pimps in the hotel that know about it. You want to write a serious paper about some stupid subject.

AJ: I have to. You know.

HS: Yes, I saw him [P. Adams Sitney, A. J.'s film teacher] a couple of days ago. I tried to get him to go see *The Harder They Come*, but he wouldn't bother to look at it more than once.

AJ: Yeah. So I don't know what to do. Maybe I'll just like make a tape or something and—I just want to see into you. See what you're about, you know. And then I want to write something. Because I know nothing about you, so I figure if I talk to you, you know, just sit down and bullshit or do anything, you know.

HS: Yeah, well, that's the standard procedure, and I mean it's sort of worn out and no information comes out of it. All I could do is alienate you.

AJ: The only thing I know about you is what I've read, and it's not that much, and I don't learn anything about you from what I read.

HS: Well, I'm dirty. I haven't changed my clothes for a long time. When do you want to do this?

AJ: Tomorrow, probably, if you can. See, I'm really on a tight schedule because I have to have this done by Sunday, you know.

HS: I think you should skip it. I mean it isn't worth it. All that would happen is that I would be busy doing other things. There would be a succession of people coming in and out, and I wouldn't have much to say. What is this paper for, anyhow?

AJ: Talk about *Heaven and Earth Magic*.

HS: What?

AJ: *Heaven and Earth Magic*.

HS: I have nothing to say about it. It's a product of a deranged mind.

AJ: Well, could we talk about what your mind was deranged into when you were doing it, because I have to get something, you know?

HS: Yeah, I know. That's the primary thing, is that you have to get something. I gotta get money, for example. Why don't you—do you have a number or something?

AJ: Yeah, I do. Do you want to take it down? I mean, I don't even have to come over there if you don't want me to. We could do this all on the phone, you know. Because I have a tape recorder.

HS: Yes, but the whole thing is that you're attacking the problem from the wrong angle. You're unwilling to put down actually what I want to say.

AJ: I'll put down ex...

HS: Because, well, I can tell from your conversation that you're too indefinite about everything.

AJ: I'm not indefinite about it. It's just that I don't know enough about you to be definite, right? So I wanna learn.

HS: Yeah, but what do you wanna do with it after you learn about films? You're going to become a janitor or something? I just got up. Some drunks were around here last night and they would not leave until about six this morning.

AJ: You see, all I'm interested—okay, we're going to make it definite. All I'm interested in is talking about *Heaven and Earth Magic*, okay? That's all.

HS: Yes, but I will tell you the truth about *Heaven and Earth Magic*, and you'll find it uninteresting and...

AJ: Okay. That's fine.

HS: ...and I don't want my stuff misrepresented. And it's constantly being misrepresented. So did P. Adams suggest you phone me, or was this just a brilliant lightbulb burning off in your own brain?

AJ: No, I thought of it myself.

HS: How anybody could look at that tedious bit of junk and think it had anything in it? I mean...ahhhhh...okay. Well, I'll try. I'm gonna be out most of the day tomorrow. Why don't you make it this evening?

AJ: This evening?

HS: You're tied up, yes?

AJ: What time about? Because I'm tied up.

HS: Well, I don't know whether I'm tied up or not. I may go see *The Pirates of Penzance*.

AJ: Okay, can we make it like about nine o'clock or something?

HS: When? Give me your number. I'll phone you back in a little...

AJ: Okay. 255-1629. And yours is?

HS: What?...1629...255-1629, and your name is?

AJ: A. J.

HS: What?

AJ: A. J.

HS: Are those initials?

AJ: Yeah.

HS: A. J. Is that all there is to it?

AJ: A. J. Melita. M-e-l-i-t-a.

HS: M-e-l-i-t-a. Melita. A. J. Melita. What sort of name is that?

AJ: Well, my grandparents are Sicilian.

HS: Oy vey, I'm in trouble with the Mafia again. They come from Corfu or something?

AJ: No, they come from Sicily.

HS: And, you know, well I'm willing to give any aspiring student a toss, you know.

AJ: Okay, because you know, I really want to...

HS: But you have got to write down what I say. And the usual response to what I say. Who passes you on this paper? P. Adams, or who?

AJ: The only person who is going to see it is P. Adams.

HS: Okay. Then we can cook up something that will get you an A-grade or whatever you want. But the point is that it has to be a transcript of what I say. If it is indistinct, if I end sentences in the middle, if I make all kinds of mistakes in things, it has got to be left that way.

AJ: Okay. It will.

HS: Because it's a piece of psychopathic literature.

AJ: Okay. Great. Exactly. Okay. See, I'm going to be out until around eight, so call me after that, okay? If you're going to call.

HS: You mean tonight?

AJ: Yeah. I'll be definitely back here at eight o'clock, okay? So you can call me after that.

HS: Well, how late do you stay up?

AJ: I'll be up all night if I have to, you know. I wanna, you know.

HS: You haven't got anything to keep people awake, do you?

AJ: No.

HS: You don't smoke marijuana?

AJ: No.

HS: Oh boy. I think you're just out on—you might as well forget it. But I'll try anything once. But I'm telling you right now that you are going to be insulted, dissatisfied with the information you get.

AJ: But who else can I get it from? I mean, you know, all you can get is conjecture. P. Adams gave a whole lecture on it, right? So, you know, you must be able to do something.

HS: I am able to do something. I was able to create the film.

AJ: Right. I mean, as far as talking about it, though. I mean, what went on in your mind when you were doing it. Can you talk about it?

HS: Have you seen the movie *The Harder They Come*?

AJ: No, I haven't.

HS: What night is this? Friday or what?

AJ: Tonight? Friday.

HS: Okay. Well, at midnight we'll go see *The Harder They Come*.

AJ: Okay. Okay. It's at the Elgin.

HS: Oh, you wouldn't understand it. That's the trouble. See, there's no starting point. How old are you?

AJ: Twenty-two.

HS: Yeah. By twenty-two years old you should have some kind of—I don't know what to do. I just got up. I can't answer any questions now, but I'll—I mean, I can't even say what I'm gonna do. I sort of doubt if I'll be here this evening, but I'll try to call you at eight. If not, what time will you be in tomorrow?

AJ: All day. I mean, I'll be—before twelve o'clock.

HS: I ain't getting up before twelve o'clock.

AJ: I would really like to do this tonight if—if it's possible, you know. I mean, what are you doing? I mean, I could come... we could talk on the street. I don't care.

HS: The theory thing is that I have to get a hold of the doctor to get some pills, as it were. And I can't do it. I don't know whether I can do it. I'm not going to be very loquacious. I can be loquacious like I am now, but it is not going to be sensible. And I'm tired of insensible things being printed about me. So I'll try, though. Because you're only twenty-one years old, and are obviously very dumb. So, hey, why did you call me first thing in the morning? I've gotta get out of here. Anyhow, A. J., P. Adams, you don't have any name like...?

AJ: My name is Anthony.

HS: Anthony Joseph.

AJ: John, you know, but I've been called A. J. ever since I was born. I mean, it's nothing I made up. It was given to me, like, you know...

HS: Your moniker. Yes. Okay, A.J., I'll try to be back here by eight, but I have to go out and perform some complicated gymnastics at this point and I just don't know whether I'll be back, is what I'm worried about.

AJ: Well, I'll be...

HS: You don't have wealthy parents or anything?

AJ: Well, here and there.

HS: Here and there?

AJ: Yeah. Sort of. I mean they're not, you know—I mean, I don't know. I could say they're wealthy.

HS: Yeah, because financial contributions are always helpful.

AJ: Okay. I'll think about it.

HS: What do you mean, you'll think about it? You're passing the grade, the course, okay. So I'm sorry. What I'm telling you now—I have just given you a brief lecture on *Heaven and Earth Magic*. It's silly that you don't have your tape recorder set up to make it on the phone.

AJ: No, I have it up. It's on. This thing's all on tape. I don't want to make you more paranoid than you are, but...

HS: I'm not more paranoid than I are. Great. Now let me see if there are any final statements. When did you start recording?

AJ: The second I dialed.

HS: It records fairly well?

AJ: Yeah, I have a microphone that goes onto the phone. It just fell off for one minute before, but I put it back on, so anything you say now...

HS: Great. Okay. I'll try to call you around eight.

AJ: Okay. Fine.

HS: Okay, A. J., bye-bye.

At the Chelsea

HS: Is it running? The doctor is supposed to be on the way with the medication. Where is the microphone? It would be impossible that we would use up the entire three hours. I mean, I want to use up the entire three hours of tape. I no doubt can ramble on and on and on. But the thing to do is turn it off. But I'll try to do—because all of my films are structured that way. Like the room is now set up like *Mahagonny*. I'm working on the film of Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht's *Mahagonny*, so that the things like the tables, chairs, thumbtacks, everything, is structured along the lines of the city of *Mahagonny* as nearly as I can construct it at this point, so that my film's being is directly with human life, or something on that order. Very little can be said about *Number 12*, which is *Heaven and Earth Magic*, for some reason I'm not exactly sure of. Well, it's a simple title. That film's number is "number twelve," and I only number my films. I don't use my name, titles, nothing on the film, although I used to put end titles on them. But I discovered that the audience didn't know when the goddamned thing was over, because they go on for a long time. So as far as describing *Heaven and Earth Magic*, the best that I can do is try to reenact what happened while I was making the thing, which was—but anyhow, for the moment, I just bought some records and I want to play with them for awhile, and I want to drink my milk, which I just warmed. And so, I'll get back to the last subject, which was what?

AJ: *Number 12.*

HS: How it was made. Yes. We'll go into the next shot on how it was made. But in the time being I'm going to drink some milk. Okay, and the stop button is there. Yeah, about the Kleenex. The Kleenex box is all banged up, and has toilet paper stuck in it because I had fallen into a period where I was a heavy alcoholic. I'll be fifty-eight years old later this month, and of course when I was younger I thought that the feelings that went through me were that I would outgrow them, that the anxiety or panic or whatever it is called would disappear. But you sort of suspect it at thirty-five, but when

you get to be fifty you definitely know you're stuck with your neuroses, or whatever you want to classify them as: demons, completed ceremonies, any old damn thing. So, as far as Kleenex is concerned, I threw it away. But then I realized I didn't have money. So my policy lately, in order to see if I was able to put myself on my feet, the money for *Mahagonny* has been spent on things that I considered more important than *Mahagonny*. There are enough movies. There are tons and tons of motion pictures, and if you want a motion picture made, all you have to do is give someone the money and they will make the motion picture. So there is no need for that. Anything that money can buy, being worthless, and so on and so on and so on. So my general habit has been to allow myself a certain amount of money per day, and then produce that, which has been quite a bit. But in the—since—in the last two days I've spent something like six hundred dollars on records. Maybe. Five hundred at least. No, no, no, I'm figuring all wrong. I don't know what it was. I know that this little pile of fourteen records here was over a hundred dollars. They're nothing that would interest you at all. I don't want them touched anyhow. They are sacred things. I'm basically interested in magic. That is the, so-called magic, you see, I—Charlie Chan movies, Fu Manchu movies, and worse. I'm not granting that kind of interview that is introduced by your saying—because I don't. I told you that I had to sit around for a while. You, being there, I point out that it's gotta be finished by tomorrow. Of course, this gets me in the position of not being able to look at the thing. The most ridiculous statements made regarding me, over which I have no control.

AJ: What I was...

HS: Don't try to defend yourself.

AJ: No, I'm not. But just what I was interested in, basically, was if we could talk about...

HS: We dare not talk about *Heaven and Earth Magic*, because *Heaven and Earth Magic*—and I wish you would let me drink my milk and play with my records instead of going around the thing as if I was some kind of businessman. I'm not a businessman. After I

made my first film it was ten years before I got a hold of any method of seeing it projected. And I didn't have a camera, so I drew it on the film in 1939 and 1940 and 1941, and—but then ten years went by before Clarence Laughlin, who owns the Bell Lumber Company or some damned thing, came through San Francisco, and I just happened to be there, and he paid for a screening room, which could have been done all along for twenty-five dollars or something, but I never had twenty-five dollars. I was eating out of garbage cans and things, and—in order to keep going on, which is difficult. Because when somebody, well—everybody is mad at me at this point.

AJ: What were the circumstances that led you around to coming into the frame of mind...

HS: You don't understand anything. What is the circumstances that led you to be some kind of moron that—it would be better if all these people who were studying film, writing a [Cézanne?] film, were to become filmmakers. I mean, imagine what would happen. The film industry would collapse from overweight. It is collapsing anyhow, and it's interesting to be in on the collapse. I would like to go to Hollywood. You know, make a Western, actually.

AJ: What do you think of...

HS: What do I think of what?

AJ: What do you think of Nicholas Ray?

HS: No.

AJ: He makes Westerns. Well, he made some Westerns.

HS: I don't ever...

AJ: He reminds me of you a lot.

HS: I don't often see films except that I have violent fights, fighting with somebody the night before last, and last night somebody else was here with a knife after the person who was—in order to disarm the idiot that had the gun, I had to—because he was aiming at the birds and was threatening to kill them—that I had to take it away from him. Then, to stop him from fiddling with me at all, hold it against my head in order to show them that I'd blow my brains out rather than have this sort of thing going on. So then it occurred to me that the best thing for this particular person and myself to do is make

a Western film and enact the whole thing out. Instead of having to do it in this room, which as you can see, the door has been battered down so many times that it's impossible—anything of value whatsoever has been removed by brigands of one sort or another, due to the fact that I will let anybody in here.

AJ: I can see that.

HS: If I'm feeling all right, the—well, especially when I was drinking, you see, because I was drinking extremely heavily for a number of years. But most of them are mad at me now. Everybody's mad at me. You're mad at me because I won't give a nice trite interview, and what I want to do—oh, I should have stated I've got to drink my milk. I've now spent absolutely all of the money I have. If I allow myself five dollars a day, I can go a little less than three weeks. But I'm sure to take that money and waste it. Now this means that I've exhausted all possibilities. That I have taken all the money that—of course, a great number of people owe me money. You're in the very same room as the, like, assassins were last night, with razor-sharp knives, you know—to get them cab fare and to carry them out of the room. They were so goddamn drunk they didn't know what they were doing, and it came at an awkward time. There are some records that I want very badly that I've never seen before by, J. E. Mayner, in ten volumes. Of course, the whole ten volumes aren't there. They're made somewhere in Kentucky and are no doubt very rare. Of course, there's a whole bunch of fiddling conventions: Boulder, Colorado blah blah. I have a record phobia at this point. I have got to drink my milk. I painted before I—no, I came from a—I didn't live in a town that was a little under 5,000 people and, of course, Washington, until I was eighteen years old. My big ambition being to go to Seattle which was about two-hundred miles away, but there was no way of getting there. So I stopped listening—I mean going. I went to cowboy movies when I was a child, but I looked at the stills of movies. The—like, it is more interesting being alive and observing the perfect 3-D wide-screen effect produced by the central nervous system than in sitting in a theater watching some kind of myth that can be mapped out accord-

ing to, you know, Lévi-Strauss' structural blah blah. I mean, when you've seen one, you've seen them all. They make uncook, the cook-cook, the raw-blah, the—it is—all you have to do to make a good cowboy movie is to have people that are mad at each other and that can play character roles. I don't remember who any of these people were. What was that studio that made all those films? Like Tex Ritter made ninety films, ninety-some films. Roy Rogers made God only knows how many. They all employed the same formula for them. I can't remember the name of the studio, but it was fixed up like a corral. A gate to it, see, Hollywood during the thirties and forties being very peculiar. Like the Chaplin studios were there at the end of the forties and were kept up. I think they are at this very moment kept the way they were. I don't know. The—Dr. Leonard, a Turkish Indian who was a friend of mine at the University of California when I was teaching music history there in the late forties and early fifties, he was studying law. I don't know what he was studying. First he studied to be—he got to be an M.D. and a lawyer. Cordell Hull, the Roosevelt Secretary of State, nephew or something, is now like a complete amphetamine addict. Of course, didn't want to be a lawyer. Was either disbarred or something went wrong with the doctor, and all his, anyhow, when Charlie Chaplin came to town. Cheyenne O'Neill, who is Oona Chaplin's brother, is like hanging around the scene all the time, see. This guy out of *Bonnie and Clyde* is always in the lobby. I forget what his name is, though. Some minor character that he's dangerous when drunk, because he falls down. Tim—anyhow, whatever the studio was that made all the Bill Boyd movies and so forth. You know, the front gates were fixed up like an entrance to—and everything. The movies were, of course, sort of improvised on the order of [the way] soap operas are improvised now. What was that one that even had a special built-in—you probably never heard of it—soap opera. It took place in a house that was like a kid living in it and it had haunted passages and stuff in it, and some fairly famous actress was in it. It was on every day. I mean, they make that stuff up. We can't go on about that. Forget it.

AJ: I don't know anything about you. All I know is I saw your film.

HS: The method of making the film was to prepare the pieces. I cannot go into that, but the pieces were all prepared first. Filed. In other words, it was only a limited amount of things. Like at the present time I'm interested in sorting records, because I think that music has like some kind of powers to it that would be interesting to explore, and I've already done this. I've made a large collection of records. The standard collection still, the one that Alan Lomax refers to in his book, which unfortunately I can't afford, as being the best single collection, is now housed in Lincoln Center in a special library and not available to the public to get tapes. That was made from about 1935 to 1945, and so I gave up the record thing. But then after I learned more about various religions, after I'd seen more things that would be considered extraordinary events, they wouldn't be explained away by—or anything like that. I got back to music again as being fundamental to whatever the purpose of life is. Because, after all, everybody eventually dies, and, they say—but that may be a myth also. Or you may die without noticing it, on account of there being unlimited time and limited particles, and the particles can only arrange, blah blah. The human can only arrange itself into thoughts, and the possibility of preparing substantial images, or so on. In other words, one can only exist if things are in certain arrangement. Now, it has occurred to me that within these arrangements there can be gaps in them. What may seem as continuous thought or the continued existence of the table here—of course, all this is happening in anti-matter anyhow, only in a sort of mirror image. Are people in anti-matter? Of course they're sitting there talking like we are, except they're mirror images, but are they talking about the same thing? Big question. Well, so all I can try to do as far as explaining what *Heaven and Earth Magic* is about is to say that the way it was done was by—in divination it would be called the *I Ching* if properly performed—I mean if you don't just—the foundation is done, you know, with yarrow sticks, and it takes a long time and is painful. At least after the exchange of the social

organization in—after the fall of the Chou dynasty in about 300 B.C. or 800 B.C., whenever. Everybody dates it different. So it was done on a tortoise shell by burning holes and burning incense, and when the lines that cracked were the anti-lines and blah blah blah. But it's one method of divination. So at this point I'm sorting records, looking for the like fundamental sounds that control the operation, something that will get me off the hook, in other words, and certain automatic limitations have to be placed on it. Like there are records that I want very, very, very desperately, that a postcard would get, or that a phone call would get. But they're off Manhattan Island, and I confine myself entirely to records that can be found on Manhattan Island. Otherwise the number of records is enormous, and the amount of money spent would be so enormous that it would be stupid. I'm trusting in God, sort of, to bring the right records to me at the right time. When I was making *Number 12*, which I'm going to refer to what is called *Heaven and Earth Magic*, by—the method was to collect as many possible books with illustrations of the steel engraving type in them. Now it was realized that the print that existed of *Heaven and Earth Magic* is not a good print at all. It was about five generations from the original. At one point I gave up the thing entirely. I wanted some Beatles music played with a particular film, and the projectionist slapped on God only knows what, and when I rushed up to the projectionist to complain, he said, "This is the same thing." Well, it wasn't the same thing as The Beatles, and so I smashed the recording apparatus, broke my glasses, abandoned the film, and rushed out into the night. The copy then was traced down by Jonas Mekas, and out of the thirty or so films I have made, only—I mean, less than half—in many cases the very best ones, two of them—one of them being a beautiful color film, something like *Heaven and Earth Magic*, is gone entirely. A short study for *Heaven and Earth Magic*, that used entirely different characters but was shorter, is also missing. The originals of everything being missing, because I went to Oklahoma and got involved with the Indians in a little town called Anadarko, very heavily. Stayed there a year. In the meantime—over a year and a half—and the rent ran up so tremen-

dously on my apartment, I'll tell you, not exactly that. The stuff was still here when I got back. But when I came back with hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of recordings of music from the Kiowa tribe that were seldom studied by—well, James Mooney in the 1890s was the last person they had much to do with. But I was thrown in jail in Anadarko and which ordinarily only has Indians. So I met a great number of Kiowa. When I came back, the local police gave me twenty-four hours, finally, to get out of town. I came back with so many tapes that I moved into the Earle Hotel just to get away from all this accumulation of junk, see. Everything in here having to be given—something done to it once it's—so, in *Heaven and Earth Magic*, the books were picked up by going through a large number of bookstores on Third Avenue. You know, about a year, maybe two years of looking for cows in different positions, people in different positions—that sort of thing—and then making up cards that made all the possible combinations. It had a picture of a watermelon. So a watermelon could open and things come out of it. Or it could do a number of things. Same thing with an egg or a bird. A bird could lay an egg, or a bird could come out of an egg. Or a hamburger could come out of an egg. Or—the poor watermelon just got so worn out that, being rotated on pins, that it, well, poor thing. [phone rings] Hello? Yes Frank. Yeah, well, I'm being interviewed now by some student from someplace or other who wants to write a paper on me. I don't have any money. I went out and spent all of my money. What? Where are you? Do you have the book with you? Yeah, well don't—I saw that record you were speaking about by—but I forget what the—what was the name of it? Something to do with Federation maybe? Federation. I found that record. No, I didn't have the money to buy it. When I finally I don't know. Forget it. There's a whole list of records that have to be gotten, but the money has now been spent, period. No, you won't, because I'm not going to tell anybody where it is. There are other more important things to be got than that, see. Because I'm sure that could be picked up in Brooklyn. As I said, the next time I get the record spasm I'll go to Brooklyn. I don't have any money. I have some loose change. I gave your

friend two subway tokens. Well, whoever that drunk was last night that was up here—and I'm not talking about you, I mean the other drunk. But anyhow, I hope you got those records home. They may not be very good. I don't know. He's very good, and those are pressed in Denmark, and are—I mean, I'm sure the pressing is good. Okay. I don't know. I'll probably—I don't know what I'm doing. I can't answer. I'm having a terrible time. Goodbye. I'm sorry to say goodbye, but the tape machine is running [end of phone conversation].

What I want to do for the time being is point out this sortilege process by getting books, getting subjects, cutting subjects out, filing them in glassine envelopes according to subjects, starting with, you know—don't suck your—what is it? You have a toothache or something? Or do you ordinarily suck on your finger? Anal fixation, yes. I mean, oral fixation. I'm getting the portals mixed up. So, various combinations could be made. Then, I'd get up and animate what I had dreamt, just dreamt, as closely as I could. As soon as I reached total exhaustion I would go back to bed again and dream some more. I didn't go out of the house for food, except maybe once a week. I had the windows sealed off so it would be dark. The place really became a mess—300 E. 75th Street. All of my paintings, all of my films, all of everything was destroyed, taken to the garbage dump. Thrown in the garbage dump by mistake. The paintings became—some of them having taken as much as six or seven years to make, very small paintings, and they were more valuable than the films, you see. I regret having lost the paintings more than the films, you know. Well, like an accessory to my painting, it was never supposed to be shown at all. Except occasionally I show them for a few friends. But I didn't have a projector, so even that didn't really pay off. *Heaven and Earth Magic* used to be on one hundred-foot reels that were kept in the bathroom medicine cabinet. Anyhow, the film was done that way. In this case, in studying music I—by being an artificial limitation—providing any limitation is artificial—of buying records that are available easily. It's a pain in the ass. In general, the records I want,

the remasterings of the Library of Congress records are made in—they're made in Sweden, but the distributor for them is in New Jersey, but—and there are eight volumes to it. They're searching, searching, searching though stores in town will not produce them. Well anyhow, so you see me at this point wound up, nervous. My nerves are frayed.

* * *

To explain to you that these events that are being enacted, are being enacted in the same method in which *Heaven and Earth Magic* was constructed. That I went to sleep, did it, woke, went back to sleep, animated that. Now all I can do is try to change, which is what I told you on the phone earlier today was going to irritate you, alienate you, et cetera, because you—I'm involved in too many plots at once, and I'm nervous. The man who just phoned last night, I mean, a few minutes ago, threatened to kill me last night with a knife, a knife so sharp that I couldn't get rid of him. This goddamned Persian has fallen asleep on the bed, and he could not be moved by hammering, banging, but—so the—now I'm extremely talkative because I borrowed some dextrodine from somebody in the building here on account of Dr. Gross is supposed to prescribe the stuff to keep me from drinking. He's sick in bed. He has it in his possession. But I don't have cab fare to go to his office, and he is going to try to get down here. But I can't pay him if he does get here, being I done spent the money in an effort to rejuvenate myself. As far as consciousness and unconsciousness, I don't know what happens under those circumstances. But anyway, what I wanted to say is that I'm irritated that you want to get down to *Heaven and Earth Magic*, because you are getting down the *Heaven and Earth Magic*, but you don't realize it when you see it. It is the most tedious, boring, disgusting, just awful film. It is an almost impossible thing to sit and look through, because society is so jaded or one thing or other. Like three nights ago it showed at the Louvre, where people had to walk by the *Mona Lisa* and *Winged Victory* and stare at—but it's part of

my life, which is like the life of an insane person. The fantasies revolving around *Mahagonny* having grown to such a point that all I can do with *Heaven and Earth Magic* is to try to get you to live out the thing at this time. I mean, there is no speeding it up or slowing it down. It's like a steady grinding process of a dog howling, fighting with the cats, mummy cases. Eghhhhhh! Elevators. It's not shown in its proper form at all. It was originally on a square screen with slides and colored lights on curtains and all sorts of elaborate stuff that—in Steinway Hall, where only six people could sit down at one time. I got somebody to put up a little money, and somebody showed up who wanted a more fancy film on the same technique, but they did not give me time to do it, because I work exceedingly slow. Part of the general theoretical background being that everything should be done by one person, sort of, and if there's going to be any beginning, middle, and end to the film, they are automatic. Have you read Lévi-Straus's stuff? Yeah. Well, that's enough to know what he's up to. I mean the main one made by somebody else, I forget who—but anyhow, the ones on mythology are okay. His totem is a rehashing of the same old junk on the Australian, using the poor aboriginal Australians as the victims about which nobody knows enough to write anything, so everybody from J. G. Frazer and Evans-Pritchard drive down to Blanco Shit-Fart. I mean, haul out the plans, and stuff them in, or some other—all of these meetings of people who are interested in films are so irritating to other people. I usually smash stuff, because they get on my nerves. But I can't resist trying to find out what happened, see. It's better than a movie. But it's boring, because you're doing a silly thing anyhow by going to school. You'd be much better off—well, of course you're a fragile delicate character that could hardly stand—you would get along better with other people than myself. I took too much speed today. I wanted to be talkative when you got here, so there was a limited amount left, and the doctor being sick, I took really what was tomorrow's dose or something, so that I would be talkative, but it also leads to a whiny sort of voice connected with like didactic statements of a stupid nature, see. But there's no way of telling how

Heaven and Earth Magic was made that's legitimate, except through illustration, you know. That illustration is not one of taking scissors and cutting out a picture of a cow or something. It's—you remind me—you make me think your father is something like a mortician or something. Could be a grocery man, too. I don't know. He somehow has a lot of stuff around that should have been disposed of in some other way. Morticians often do that because they get bodies where ashes are supposed to be sprinkled in Timbuktu, and instead they just throw them in the back room. So.... [music cue] This next song is one that we just recorded, and I hope you like it. It's called, "Help Me."

Oh I wish I was in the land of Cotton

Glory, Glory Hallelujah

Hush Little Baby, Don't You Cry

Make a motion picture right here in...corners...

You're always welcome at our house, and we hope you will stay

Keep my cash and my stash and my hash, but bury me in my shades.

No, I got on this record-buying binge on January 1, 1976, and devote all day to going to various record stores. Like, there are two record stores open now, King Karol on Broadway—well, no, actually there's a place—I don't know what its name is—near the Dixie Hotel on 42nd Street that has a branch on Broadway that are both open until 12:00. But then Colony is open until 2:00, unless they know I'm coming, in which case they stay. I think I will go and buy a record there. [music cue] The financial crisis will become extremely bad on about August 20th. This is, of course—that completes a musical description of various points that I wanted to cover. The transcription of the music can be made simple by assuming that half-tones are represented by the letter *A*, so that *A*—and full-tones by *B*, so that the ordinary major scale, which is whole-tone, whole-tone, half-tone, I think, would be *BB, B A B*, et cetera, et cetera. The length of the notes not mattering. This can be determined by use of a metronome, or a stopwatch, and counting the beats. However, the subject matter is the most important. The switching from, for

example, the cowboy play to whatever it was, Italian street songs or something, can simply enough be noted due to the fact that whatever his name is, John J. Anthony or somebody, who is doing this, is afraid of music and, which should be conquered and so forth, as the Queen of the Fairies describes in *Iolanthe*, by Sir William Schwenck and Sir Arthur Sullivan. Now if you would like to ask any questions regarding specific points, regarding names, dates, places, events, lawsuits, attempted suicide, attempted suicides, attempted keeping other people from committing suicide, total lack of identification, the fact that I have not paid my taxes for forty years, I have never voted, I've never had a driver's license, I only wear clothing that people throw away, I've never been in the Army, and I'm always behind on the rent. I constantly squander my money and that sort of thing. Before we get to the question-and-answer period, however, I'm going to read parts to the—I don't know what it is—creative artist's supper, I guess—CAPS, because as I explained to them that I had squandered all of the money, that I had spent it on projects such as giving it away to people who had no money whatsoever, or entertaining them with large amounts of liquor and one thing and another, and at the same time, recording inside this room a greater mass of folklore, folksongs, medieval ballads, dirty stories, jokes, et cetera, that people wandering around the streets with much more than a sixty-five-dollar Wollensak have been able to accomplish. The world's greatest authority on these things, who earns many thousands of dollars a year from songs that were popularized, for example, were discovered by me. Not even—he's so busy collecting old records that I threw away in 1940 that he doesn't realize—he wants to know why Johnny Cash—I bothered about Johnny Cash. Or even worse, considering he's a great authority on things like Negro religious music, doesn't realize that merely by going to Harlem that he can buy Savoy records, which, as I will admit, are often mislabeled, are often fucked up, because it's a cheap company. But the greatest ministers and choirs and things are all recorded live, and easily available for three or four dollars apiece in 12-inch long-plays. The only reason the person I'm referring to

makes a great deal of money off Sleepy John Estes and Memphis Minnie and Blind Boy Fuller and Washboard Sam and The Carter Family, which I bought a record of today. The discovery of Sara Carter being rather peculiar, the rediscovery of her—because after being the most successful singer in the country, she moved to the hills of California, and there was a thunderstorm, and this was in, oh dear, I forget the name of the place. It's near Murphys, and it is where Mark Twain writes the—his thing, *Roughing It*—the chapter in *Roughing It* called "The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County." As we staggered in out of the rain, we tried to get a place to stay. Somehow—I don't remember how—it turned out that it was Sara Carter who had completely given up music, had become religious, would not allow a guitar in the house. But when she found out that I had probably 2,000 of her recordings, was sorry that I hadn't brought them with me. She was also—I was embarrassed to meet her, and a very embarrassing scene occurring when I said can I photograph your—can I—would it be all right if I photographed some color pictures? She thought I was gonna say something like photograph her pussy or something, because when I brought up certain songs that she had recorded, such as "Takes a Rubber Ball to Rock,"—no, "Takes a Rockin' Chair to Rock, Takes a Rubber Ball to Roll, Takes the Man I Love to Satisfy my Soul,"—and how did she happen to record it—that—she said something about "dirty old ugly talk." She unearthed the letter in the trunk in the attic. At this point she was married to another one of her cousins, Cloy Bayes. They had left Clinch Mountain, Virginia, because there were too many black people. She'd seen two or three of them that year, and they decided that was two or three too many, so they moved north of Sacramento into the so-called Mother Lode country, which is most peculiar. The fire department in Murphys consisting actually of these old-fashioned fire engines that the firemen dragged through the streets and pump on that I thought had gone out with Currier & Ives or something. But there they were. You can also sit there among the wreckage and pan enough gold there every day to live a fairly comfortable life. Fortunately, I don't think it has been

destroyed by the hippies yet, whatever they are. The fact that the man who came to interview me, J. P. Morgan or John D. Rockefeller or somebody, will not allow me to smoke a marijuana cigarette. I was kind enough to get into the bathroom before taking my dexedrine tablet, in case it might frighten him. However, it may be that the time is not ripe to make the letter public. I had thought maybe this was when it should be done, because it shows how many follies people have. How about if I go into the bathroom. Nobody will touch anything. It's too much of a strain on your—anyhow, the letter was written in a single night. I became utterly desperate. It became necessary to tell the entire truth regarding everything, and which registered such joy at CAPS that finally somebody had told the truth, that they forced a great deal more money on me on the basis of the letter, in which I declare myself publicly insane, but point out the value of literature of the insane. This is all done in a very clever way, citing various works by Senate President Schreber, who is one of the main characters in what this idiot refers to as *Heaven and Earth Magic*, not having examined any literature on the subject at all, evidently. Or else he would realize that that is not the name of my film, and that I have constantly—can you read Italian? Yeah, I'd like to know what this article says. So, this man, I believe A. J. are his initials, having in effect refused to smoke, to allow me to smoke in the room, has automatically cut himself off from Lucien Carr, who is the most powerful newsman in the country. Of course, he had very good training. He went to high school with William Burroughs, and was Jack Kerouac's roommate at Columbia. He has murdered two people, and everybody is scared of Lucien. But his mother is the sister of Mrs. Winthrop Rockefeller, so that even if you murder somebody at the dinner table with a knife, it scarcely gets into the paper. Lucien, who is now the Vice President of the United States, his second cousin, or something, often having sat here and turned on to grass. It's evidently not allowed at NYU, which even—well, Princeton may be as bad as NYU. It's hard to tell. They're stuck with the Bollingen Foundation. So, instead of reading my beautiful letter, which would show how it is possible to live without fighting

anybody, without doing anything except spending your money as fast as you can get it, on the premise that God will provide, there being many places in the scriptures that indicate that. Although perhaps the most simple one is—but I have forgotten. I was going to say something about "His eye is on the sparrow," but that would sound stupid, because the man has been reading Kierkegaard or something, and who is just completely innocuous. I'm all for Kierkegaard, but I would like to hear what this article says which is Italian, and I do not read Italian. At least I think it's in Italian. But it just came in the mail. No, no, start at the top.

AJ: Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music*—The American folk music has...[reading article]

HS: Okay, keep reading. I'll read the letter. But try to make your voice louder, because it will punctuate the points in the letter. Skim the thing over for a second. While the gentleman is studying the article in Italian, preparatory to reading it, at the same time I read the letter, I am going to put on a recording of one of Gabrieli's compositions that he wrote while—it was published in 1580, and has never been well-known, being as that it existed before Bach, and although he was the organist at St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice, he has never been well-known, because he existed before Bach, along with the Gregorian chants, and a great amount of other music. Have you figured out what it says? [phone rings]

Hello. What? Yes, hi. Oh, I just wanted to add one thing regarding Sara Carter and her rediscovery. It was the first place that I ate peyote, was at her place, nobody knowing about it then. Since then, of course, my extensive study with six LP records and a very large book on the subject has come out. The standard authority on the use of what the interviewer would undoubtedly consider a dangerous narcotic, but is not, is a curative herb that was planted by God, at least according to the people that I talked to, who were, of course, Indians and therefore are not to be trusted. Ready to go? Talk loud enough so that it gets on the tape. Among other interesting things that I don't know, whether any of the readers of this paper will have ever heard of Jimmie Rodgers, but he was the first folksinger to

become a multi-millionaire. When he made his first record he was like reduced to utter poverty. He had been a brakeman on the railroad. But as he sings numerous songs about TB, et cetera—he was dying, and the doctor told him to stay in bed, but there was no way of staying in bed because there was no food. The doctor saying that he had only five years to live at the most, and if he got out of bed he maybe had three years. So he got out of bed and made a recording on some portable equipment in 1928, I believe, and became a multi-millionaire, all of which he gave away, and which shortened his life from five years to three years. In the—his final recordings—well, what I wanted—were made in combination—a church that had been a combination hospital and recording studio, because he was only able to stand up for a few moments at a time before he had to lie down again. He made a very jolly record called *Whipping That Old TB*, and that night went home to his hotel in, I believe, the Versailles Hotel—I always get the name of the place mixed up, it's 34th and Broadway—where he had a hemorrhage and died. The reason for having come to make one final recording session was because he had given all of the money away and did not even have any money for food. So when I—but Sara Carter told me that everywhere Jimmie Rodgers went, he threw marijuana seeds off the back of the train so that you could tell where he had been. I just hope that all of his records have always been kept in print by Victor for fifty years now, and I hope that some of the readers of this will listen to his records, because it will show what life is, if it is led properly. Another person that cannot be included among desirable people is Joe Hill. This copy of the book was given to me by Woody Guthrie, who was also kicked out for having smoked marijuana, and along with Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, who was given a state burial in Moscow, had Joe Hill's song "The Rebel Girl" framed on her wall. I would like to say about Mrs. Flynn that though she many times loaned me her typewriter, gave me small amounts of money, like thirty or fifty dollars, she never once mentioned anything about Communism. She had been the—because I don't like Communists and foreigners or niggers or myself, for that matter. But I'm gonna

read Joe Hill's last will and testament in the copy that was given to me by Woody Guthrie's widow, who also gets kicked out, being's I've sat around and turned on with her. This was written in his cell November 18th, 1915, on the eve of his execution, which was of course framed by the blah blah: "*My will is easy to decide, for there is nothing to divide. My kin don't need to fuss and moan; moss does not cling to a rolling stone. My body, if I could choose, I would to ashes it reduce, and let the merry breezes blow my dust to where some flowers grow. Perhaps some fading flower then would come to life and bloom again. This is my last and final will. Good luck to all of you. Joe Hill.*" Murdered by the authorities of the state of Utah, November 19th, 1915." He wrote a number of songs that were later used extensively, such as "There'll Be Pie in the Sky When You Die." In fact, depending on the amount of tape—yes, there's quite a bit, there's more than enough tape—I'm going to read a poem by one of his students. This is—I just want to mention one other little thing here—is Frank Little's last will and testament. It says in parentheses, "Lynched at Butte, Montana, August 1st, 1917," one of the lines being, "No, not you, half Indian, half white man...." Like everything else in the song book, "Christians at War," by John F. Kendrick, being's the thing is ten cents, it used to be five cents, but now it's ten cents, or at least it was at the time Woody Guthrie got his copy, which was 1930-something. It used to be sung to the tune of "Onward, Christian Soldiers," which I'm not sure I know the [sings "Onward, Christian Soldiers"]—no, maybe it's better read: "Onward Christian." This is the way I sung it to Bob Dylan in Washington Square. As everybody knows, five of the tunes on his first album being derived directly—exact copies of records I had issued on Folkways Records a number of—ten years before:

*"Onward, Christian soldiers! Duty's way is plain;
Slay your Christian neighbors, or by them be slain,
Pulpiteers are sprouting effervescent swill,
God above is calling you to rob and rape and kill,
All your acts are sanctified by the lamb on high;*

*If you love the Holy Ghost, go murder, pray, and die.
 Onward, Christian soldiers! Rip and tear and smite!
 Let the gentle Jesus bless your dynamite.
 Splinter skulls with shrapnel, fertilize the sod;
 Folks who do not speak your tongue deserve the curse of God.
 Smash the doors of every home, pretty maidens seize;
 Use your might and sacred right to treat them as you please.
 Onward, Christian soldiers! Eat and drink your fill;
 Rob with bloody fingers, Christ okays the bill,
 Steal the farmers' savings, take their grain and meat;
 Even though the children starve, the Saviour's bums must eat,
 Burn the peasants' cottages, orphans leave bereft;
 In Jehovah's holy name, wreck ruin right and left.
 Onward, Christian soldiers! Drench the land with gore;
 Mercy is a weakness all the gods abhor.
 Bayonet the babies, jab the mothers, too;
 Hoist the cross of Calvary to hallow all you do.
 File your bullets' noses flat, poison every well;
 God decrees your enemies must all go plumb to hell.
 Onward, Christian soldiers! Blight all that you meet;
 Trample human freedom under pious feet.
 Praise the Lord whose dollar sign dupes his favored race!
 Make the foreign trash respect your bullion brand of grace.
 Trust in mock salvation, serve as tyrant's tools;
 History will say of you: "That pack of goddamned fools."*

I don't know when John Kendrick wrote that. I presume around 1908. Now are you prepared to read this? I would like to say that I'm a Christian and give the church a certain amount of money to keep my name on the prayer list so that I—I mean, it's a comic poem, but nonetheless is full of good ideas—and because prayer, and the prayers for me occur in a little church run by people from Barbados up in Harlem, but they've been effective. Even though they're in broken English, supposedly broken English, providing you haven't read the books on creolization and de-creolization, and the formation of languages, and the blah blah reports from the University of Indiana, and the Navy and et cetera, that proves that broken English

is a better method of communication than standard English. Are you ready to go? Now make your words loud so they can be heard on the microphone, because I'm going to talk fairly loud, and you are fairly far from the microphone. Well, this is to Andy Berber at CAPS, 250 West. Start reading. It's to be antiphonal, a la the "Kyrie El" that preceeds the...

AJ: [reads] "The American folk music...[both voices together]
 HS: "I'm writing you this rather informal progress report for two reasons; first, because though I have tried to convince you by word and deed that I was suffering from what my doctor enigmatically calls a severe psychic discompensation, you have been adamant in your refusal to accept the fact that I was perhaps loco. [Smith asks A.J. to read louder] I now prove it to you; secondly, because even among the laity there is an ever-increasing amount of interest in the literature of the mentally deranged, in which I am always ready, nay eager, to be a master. I am, alas, myself a maniac. There is admittedly a connection between art and madness, whether it be a severe case of the latter, or a scarcely noticeable but telltale super-accuracy of the brush or pen. I have always used my God-given gift of mental disease as perhaps the most valuable component in my work. In point of fact, the whole film, on the merits of which I was awarded the CAPS grant, was made during a period of particularly severe mental derangement. When I drunkenly told you as I accepted the first check how unlikely it was that I would follow the budget, I little suspected just how far my barque would drift from its appointed mooring. How the money was actually spent can be learned from the bills that accompany this report. As the sort of film I make is improvised through the dictates of a diseased brain, I can never tell in which direction it's going to jump anymore than I can tell what I am going to dream of a week from next Thursday. *Mahagonny* is particularly difficult. You have to *live Mahagonny*, in fact, *be Mahagonny*, in order to work on it. Thus it is that it became more convenient and cheaper to set up a cutting room where I live than to rent one. I can also arrange things in the room like the

city of Mahagonny itself. Money that is allotted to raw stock, et cetera, for achieving certain effects for the use of filters, was used to study more about movement and personality in relation to emotion, insofar as it affected the rhythmic cutting technique I'm using. As the tedious task of analyzing the soundtrack, and translating its several thousand cues into universal symbols proceeded, it was necessary to make an extensive study of those musical accomplishments before and after *Mahagonny*, and especially to increase available information on non-European religion and art. Thus, a number of books and records had to be obtained, and people rewarded to impart information. This on top of paying the hotel, the psychiatrist, et cetera. As for the film itself, it is proceeding very nicely. The problems involved in turning the opera into one big ceremony, for what it is, and at the same time preserving the meaning and flavor of Brecht's libretto, is not easy. The soundtrack has been analyzed to almost its final form, the preliminary cutting of the film made, and the final one charted. The completion of the film will undoubtedly be later than the deadline originally agreed upon. I was drunk and sick most of the time before I went to the hospital in August and September, and am still very weak. Nonetheless, I will, thanks to CAPS, soon finish the film that has taken all of my resources for the last seven years. I estimate the cost of completing the film to be \$8,500, which is broken down here. "I need not read it except to say that when I got the \$8,500, I said, "Whoopie," and we had a big party, and I bought a lot more records, and a lot more books, and got high and yelled at the owner of the hotel so badly that—well, "This is slightly above the budget, but where there's—the figures include things like optical reprinting of the tableaux of the film. Titles. Printing of fully-cut film. Tints. Internegative of tinted print. Transferring magnetic film to optical track. Composite print in image and sound. All for \$8,500." I'm just adding that now, because it was such a stupid thing to say. "This is slightly above the budget. But where there's a will there's a way. I guess. You must remember that I spent all of my income on one thing or another, directly connected with making *Mahagonny*, by

my living through the birth and death of *Mahagonny* itself. More detailed theoretical information concerning the general method of approach to, and the background of the film, could be found in the original application." When I said—and this is also not in the letter—but when I said I have to spend all my time working at it, I'm doing that now in reading this letter for the first time. Because I don't even get Saturday or Friday night off. I wanted to go see a movie. I seldom go to a movie. I guess *Jaws* was the only important Hollywood film that I have seen recently, which I went to so that I could tell people fifty years from now the same way Seymour Stern is able to tell people how he went to the opening of a Buster Keaton film, *The General*, which is one of my very favorite films.

Good, good, good, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, blah blah blah. The doctor himself is a little balmy, dating the letter January 3rd, 1976, and in a spasm of garbled syntax, seemingly makes CAPS responsible for my drunkenness of twenty years standing. There is no doubt that the CAPS grant precipitated a drinking and eating frenzy unparalleled in my recent history. A frenzy terminated only when I was strapped in bed with a twenty percent chance of living, a raving maniac suffering for two weeks of hallucinatory colors that rival those the Senate President delineates so skillfully in his *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, which I would like to add for the interviewers as one of the books *Heaven and Earth Magic* was based on. *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, edited by MacAlpine and Hunter, in Volume I of *Nervous and Mental Disease Monographs*, which was printed—that whole series being printed very lavishly to prove such things as shock therapy, telephones. [phone rings] Hello. Can you wait just a minute? Hold the telephone. Only when I was strapped in bed with a twenty percent chance of living, a raving maniac suffering for two weeks from hallucinatory colors that—the other book that we basically used in making film *Number 12* was Penfield and whatever his name is at the Montreal Neurological Institute called *Epilepsy and the Functional Anatomy of the Human Brain*, which outlines 1,800 brain operations of a most extraordinary nature, of which 1,300 of the patients died. But they

were very seriously ill after 1,800 operations. Oh, Jasper is the other author. Penfield—this is all footnotes—retired to sit under the same tree that Hippocrates had sat while writing his, well, his various books on the relation between nurture and nature, that are still so useful. Carl Storm's book, *The Polar Aurora*, which Storm touchingly—which is printed in the International Library of Magnetism and Allied Studies, published by Oxford University Press, and being one of the few series that you can get classified information easily available. Back to the letter. "So that if CAPS did nothing else, it saved my life by frightening me so thoroughly that I no longer have the bad, bad desire for firewater. Now I can proceed serenely but sternly on with *Mahagonny*, producing a film that will make CAPS and all the millions of people who will see it during 1976, and the next hundred years, thoughtful, edified, and pleased."

The reason that the person I just spoke to on the phone is being invited here, who, despite the fact that he has done things like cut my throat, stab me, set fire to the records, forced me to hold a—in order to show him that I wasn't afraid of dying—to hold a loaded pistol against my ear, and then in my mouth, and pull the trigger, which due to the peculiar emanations in the room, of course guns cannot be fired in here. Is there any way of erasing that?

AJ: Why?

HS: There have been three times in my life when I have come close to death. These things with knives, guns, and revolvers, as it says in the ballad about Cole Younger, being mere wastes of time. The first time that I almost died was when I was perhaps nine or ten years old, and swam out beyond where I was able to swim and sank below the water. Well, this phenomenon about seeing your life go in front of your eyes is true. I saw. It is well covered in a symposium. The publisher, maybe Grune and Stratton, I don't remember, called *Time Distortion in Hypnosis*, plus if one would...[phone rings] hello. Yes, Jesse. I'm afraid the man might have some kind of fit, you know. I mean he may have a hotel bar of soap or something that he could put in his mouth so he could froth at the mouth and roll on the floor. I'm just trying to point out to him certain facts that Ruth

Forbes, who is—well, her income—her grandfather founded AT&T, and she receives from the ads in the telephone book alone thirty million a year, which is all her property. Plus she's the largest owner of AT&T. As her husband Arthur [Young] explained, "We have so much money that we don't know what to do with it. If you can think up" and blah blah blah. This poor man—you know he is very—he's come to interview me regarding what I'm up to. Okay. So come up and knock. No, I'll leave the door open, but—and hand you the papers through it. But I want to continue on with what I'm recording now, see? Okay. [hangs up] So I came close to death three times at least. Once when I almost drowned, as I just talked about—oh, what I started to say was that it was more—though I don't read newspapers, if anything interesting comes up, Lucien Carr, who is, as I mentioned before, his mother married Mr. Winthrop Rockefeller. You get to stay in Williamsburg, Virginia, free with a bunch of freaks running around in 18th century costumes blowing glass bubbles, digging up the new, whatever Bacon called it. What was that thing? You know, the one that wrote Shakespeare's plays. What's his name? Or one of the people that cooperated on Shakespeare's plays. Sir Francis Bacon was the one I was thinking of, and who was buried at Williamsburg. I can't remember the name of his major book. It came out about the same time as Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, and is of equal importance at understanding that government is impossible, that the purpose of government is to give a feeling of security by providing what Freud would call a father image. It is necessary to think that somebody is in control and will punish people that do bad. Now anyone who has been in jail—I must say that I've been in jail many times, for minor charges, you know. Drinking in Washington Square, something like that. But you'll find that everyone there—well, there is an impossibility of a rich man going to jail, just as there is an impossibility of a poor man becoming president. It's hard to say these things when I'm proud and happy, and so thankful I was born in America, because it gives me the freedom to work on a film that when it is done—well, anyhow, to get back to the death experiences. Lucien sent me up

these United Press releases of anything important that comes up, see, or phones me, or we meet somewhere. Oh, I haven't—oh, I've seen him once since then, after the Hurricane Carter reception, which is the last time I had a long talk with him. See, the first time, when I drowned, my life passed before my eyes more or less in chronological order. Next time, in about 1950, Lionel Hampton's band was big at that time. It was almost a rival to Dizzy Gillespie's big band. It was. More people went to hear Hamp than ever went to see Dizzy, although as a matter of fact Dizzy had a much better band, et cetera, et cetera. But there'd been a nice party. At that point, I had left my—I'd been giving a series of lectures at the University of California, and I habitually wore, for example, corduroy or velvet knickers and ruffled shirts and things. Until one day came, because I'd been hanging out with a lot of what used to be called *pachucos*, who were like Puerto Rican juvenile delinquents, connecting their folklore and life histories for analysis—they were all wearing Levis which have to be prepared in a certain way. Like the little red tag has to be ripped off in a certain way and blah blah. So I wore Levis, and Do-funnies at the University had a fit because it had been a thing that was not allowed, although when it was finally thrashed out, I got to wear them, and from then on anybody else at the University of California in 1947 or 1948, whenever this was, could wear them. Now everybody wears them, and I don't wear them because nobody has given me a pair for years, although the man who was interviewing me not only has some Levi pants on, or at least a jacket—and my big lecture, the University of—my doctoral dissertation at the University of California came off badly, because after the canapés had been prepared, Bertrand H. Bronson, the world's greatest authority—and he is the world's greatest authority—I'm afraid to call him, I want his book so badly, which traces the history of the melody for the ballads classified by Francis James Child, covered by—if anyone hears this, reads this, call me, because it is forty dollars a volume, and there are four volumes. Dr. Bronson would no doubt give me—well, I can't go into that. Well, he was lecturing at Cambridge in England, I talked his wife out of all of his best records

I needed for my collection, and I gave him some good stuff that he didn't know was good at the time, in exchange, like a copy of "Willie Moore," which I had discovered on a commercial record. It turns out that it should have been classified with the Child ballads. It was not known at the time, but it has all of the melodic and structural symptoms in the words of being an actual 14th- or 15th-century ballad. He got that in exchange for some dumb Kazee record, and eventually had to admit that I was right and he was wrong. Everybody doing that eventually, period. Well, to get back to my second death experience. There's a big party for Lionel Hampton, he's departing. So there was plenty of heroin—for example, the people who were selling it in that place, Teddy and I forgot what his—whose mother ran a shoeshine parlor. Oh yeah, because when I fled the University of California I moved into a completely black district, namely the Fillmore District, which now has changed, I understand, because I have not been in San Francisco since 1951. But at that point, the Japanese who had originally been there had been sent off to concentration camps, and the Negroes from Oklahoma, the black people as they call them now, inner-city something, had moved into the area. Well, so I was sitting near this beautiful girl who did this bebop singing with Hamp's band. We're having a big party above Jackson's Nook, which was a weird place. Well, I can't go into that, but anyhow there was plenty of everything. I think I drank a quart of Gordon's Gin. Probably had two or three teaspoons of heroin, smoked an infinite amount of marijuana. Ed Roberts had just bought a new car, so I climbed off this beautiful singer-lady's dud-hud dud-dud—whatever it was—Betty Carter or somebody—we're off to try his new car. Well, of course the first thing, we get up to a top of a hill, San Francisco having like seven hills like Rome, and bang, the brakes are gone. Oh my God, the car's gonna crash. So I was busy unloading my pockets as well as I could while drunk and blah blah, various drugs that were in them, so that, well, anyway it did crash. At which point my—the doctor remarked later—he removed pieces of glass, which still I can scrape them out sometimes. There's one right there. Bad one. My eyelids were cut

badly, because the second I went through the windshield I closed my eyes, otherwise my eyes would have been gouged out. But I was unable to speak, bleeding extraordinarily badly. They sent for a priest, not knowing what religion I belong to. The priest was administering the last rites. Some elderly person, maybe seventy years old, man, began groping me, feeling my genitals and saying, "Oh, you poor boy." All this time the priest is putting on things around his neck, and hauling out holy oil, and I was having a glorious time, however, because this time it was not a sequential event that occurred in seeing life. Well, what I wanted to say about the news item—it was in the *Times*, perhaps two months ago. I received a longer report on it from Lucien regarding people who are medically declared dead and come back to life. Well, for some reason, and as would be expected, they've located one hundred twenty-one of these cases or something like that, at least one hundred twenty. Maybe it was one hundred eighty, I don't know, and of course they all agreed, as one would suspect, that the life went before your eyes, because any fool knows that. I mean Herodotus, you know, the Desert Fathers, and everybody rapping about it. This time, however, was a vast panorama, more or less like the 49th day of the Bardo Thodol. However, not all the people in the world that were copulating at the moment, occurs in the Bardo, but it was like a giant jigsaw puzzle that I could look at all at once, of my entire life laid out, each part fitted together. The fact that I got my finger, for example, caught in a car door and was like rolling on the ground in agony somehow prevented me from falling off a cliff ten minutes later, which I would have done if I hadn't caught my finger in the door. If I hadn't been fired from a certain job, the plant was going to blow up. I'm exaggerating a little, but it was that sort of thing. It was as if the life was seen in a way where no mistake was possible. That everything fitted together well, it was absolutely extraordinary, that as it says, I believe in St. Mark, "His eye is on the sparrow," and boy, is it on it. I have been fearless. Well, I don't even pray anymore, because of God controlling—I don't mean that in a good sense that he's been described in the *Zohar*, and the *Book*

of Concealed Mystery, and in the *Greater Holy Assembly*, and *Isaac Commentaries*, and all that stuff, but as some plasma larger than the physical one that is in the brain. The thing that Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake for in 1600 was believing that there was a multiplicity of worlds that operate very much like a motion picture film packed together. Depending on your trajectory for this mass of images, it gives the appearance of the arm rising, the arm falling, the mouth opening, the table being solid, et cetera. It provides an answer to the things that the Neoplatonists were not able to answer, and therefore dragged Hypatia from her chariot onto the altar of the Christian church, and scraped the flesh from her body with cockle-shells. What are those things called? I forget. Hectons. Anyhow, it was a scientific term. So, what the people who came back from death, the thing that they all agreed on was that they didn't want to come back, that they were happier where they were, and coming back to life was a drag. Now when I say in that letter that the colors that I experienced while mad were indescribable, I don't remember much of them after I was taken to the hospital. I'd been violently ill. I was used to throwing up blood every day at that point. I just did it as a normal thing. But when a great variety of really strange things came up, and the pain was so extreme that I had to call on a very dear friend in the building, Peggy Biderman, to come lie in bed with me. I don't have any sex at all, I masturbate. That is the sum total of my sex life. It always confuses people, because they expect—whether they're men, women, anything—they somehow feel that I should fuck—where, however, I've tried various things, dogs, knotholes. At this point I normally masturbate in this room we're sitting in now, somewhat near the phonograph. I got tired of doing it in the wash basin—I mean, and where was I? I don't even know what I'm talking about. The things that went on in these hallucinations in the hospital you cannot believe. They were vivid, and lasted about two weeks. Everything went on. At one point, it sort of began when I was removed from the hospital to a haunted house that was rather next door. A gang of people jammed—who were from Mississippi or Jamaica, or God only knows where—jammed herbs up my nose. A

certain Dr. Williams was the head of them. Of course, I was strapped in bed with a straitjacket. When I arrived at the hospital, I can't remember much about it, except that Peggy and Joey tell me that it took six people to hold me down, and all of Aleister Crowley's poetry suddenly came back to me, which I hadn't even thought of for twenty years, and I'm blurting out these dreadful condemnations, though very clever condemnations—well, if there are any readers or listeners who know who Aleister Crowley is, who is a student of MacGregor Mathers, et cetera, they will understand the nature of what is going down—and all the nurses could say as all these horrible blasphemies came out was, "My, he must be a very religious person." This is in a Catholic hospital, St. Vincent's. Well, the things I went through there cannot be imagined. They jammed herbs up my nose. One of them was quite large. When I got out of the... fortunately I had been reading a couple of books by Houdini just before I went to the hospital, and among other things read that if you'd get your little finger out of the bonding, that you could get the hand out, and sure enough, it worked, with one hand. But the people, when they left for wherever they came from, they left me in the house tied and strapped in the bed, of course, piped into various things with several bags of liquid containing—that would turn into poison gas if fire reached it. Then they wrapped toilet paper around the racks that this liquid was on and set them on fire. Furthermore, they turned on the gas in the kitchen so that an explosion was liable to occur at any second. They were mad because I had pulled the herbs out. I didn't mind so much, the big one extended down into my lung, and when I pulled it out, it was like a dried rosebush. The little blossoms and everything were there. But it was small. Perhaps a foot and a half high. Just big enough to sort of fit in the lung. But I dragged it out through my nose, it was not on account of it, it was because of a short little piece about six inches or four inches long, some kind of briar, which, if you'll remember, St. Anthony says in speaking of roses, that they're beautiful from the distance. They're beautiful and luscious to smell when you begin handling them. He's comparing roses to sin at that point. No, it's St. Augustine. Pardon

me. I don't know. One of St. Augustine's early books has a comparison to the rose. He says that it is beautiful and smells good and everything, but when you grab it, you prick your fingers and then you're in trouble. Well, there was a little piece. I didn't mind the big rosebush because it had small things on it, but there was a short piece that I had to get out, and when I jerked it out, they decided to kill me. Well, following Houdini's instructions, I got my right hand out of the thing. But all this time the fire was going up where it had been tied to these bags of poison gas. With my teeth and so forth, I tore off the—the hands were sort of put on the cylinders of something, I don't know what, and then bandages swathed around them, and then leather things tied over that, and the whole works wrapped in bed. You can imagine getting out of one of them was difficult. But then with the free hand, I began working on the other one, because it was a desperate situation. If I didn't get out of there quick, the whole house was gonna blow up. I'm alone in this room. It was like an old brownstone. The window was open, and the air was coming in. It was during the summer. I got most of the stuff from the left hand off, except for one little piece of gauze. Not much larger, well, than a pencil lead. About the size of a pencil lead which would not break. I was free except for it. But all the chewing on it in the world, and all the pulling on it in the world, would not get it untied from the bed. I sat there, and I realized that this is it, Harry, you have always wondered how you would die. You've always wondered what death would be like. Now, this is it. I would like to say there might have been a slight amount of fear involved, but if there was, it was very minute. The main thing being sort of amazement that it was going to happen. You see, the first time, with the automobile accident with the priest and the freak and everything, there was like joy because I realized how foolish I was to have worried about the rent, and what people thought of me, and all those things, because they were so trivial in relation to the grandeur of the construction of the universe. In the second case, I mean, that thought wiped out everything. I didn't care whether I died then, which must be the thought that these people in the *New York Times* had, was that

there was some kind of joy or something: no more rent, no more worries, no more struggling for money, for power, for all of the things that make the world tick. In this case there was just kind of amazement. I gazed across the room and watched the fire and smelled the gas and thought, well this is a funny way to die. But there was sort of a spark of intellect left, and I...there was an empty wine bottle, because there had been a party there to celebrate my demise, and I managed to, a Gallo, you know, a Gallo wine or something, probably red port. I reached it, and with my free hand broke the bottle, and to saw the piece off that was holding me to the bed, and at that point a number of people rushed into the room led by a man with boots that came up to the, all the way up the leg, and a number of other people. At the most serious crisis during that period I was for example saved by, I won't name them, but there are two maids in the church, I mean in the hotel, who go to this church that pray for me, who got off work early. They're not supposed to know me because I am so lousy. Mr. Bard claiming that I'm the sender of everything bad that goes wrong in the hotel. That every undesirable gets in and out of this room. That's true. If they don't do anything else, they get fire axes and they chop down the door, it being just fragmented by Gregory Corso, at least fifteen times. But it's always interesting here. This is the end of the interview. That terminates it. The end. If any further material is needed on the subject, I would suggest examining the typesetting machine that Dean Swift describes in *Gulliver's Travels*. Not in the part about the Lilliputians. I forgot what country it is. One somewhere up in the sky where there's a machine with cranks on it. The French illustrator and mystic, Granville, later made a more scientific drawing of it that is quite interesting, and can be found in the book called *The Bachelor Machines*, which was the catalogue for the Venice Biennial, although it's at the Louvre now, and is a most fascinating collection of...I'm rambling, rambling, because I've taken all of my dextedrine and the doctor just phoned to say that he is too sick to come here. See, what went wrong with Mahagonny, in the play, I don't know how many of you have read the play, but everything was simple.

Mahagonny, which was a town that the Widow Begbick—there are three people on the bus in the beginning, the Widow Begbick, Fatty the Bookkeeper, and Trinity Moses who represent, respectively: sex, money, and intoxication. Or God. Trinity Moses being a very ambiguous character at the end, just before the list of things that are sung that cannot help a dead man. The final song in the opera being about that you may take a pliers and tear out a dead man's tongue, but you cannot help a dead man, that you can sponge his face with vinegar, but you cannot help a dead man, that you can give him money, that you can take money away from him, and that you can pray for him and curse him and a vast number of things that only Brecht could have thought of, all ending in the final chorus, the final words, of the last songs of the opera being, "There is no hope for you or ourselves or any of us. There is no hope for you or ourselves or any of us." But what went wrong with Mahagonny, and why, was that everything was too perfect, that once the Widow Begbick, because they could not move forward on account of the desert was ahead and they could not move backwards because the sheriff was after them, and they knew what they looked like. So the Widow Begbick, like Moses, said, "This is the place, and here we have found a city and we shall call it Mahagonny," which means City of Nets. Because it will catch men and women in the way a net catches fishes. But life there became too ordinary. You could fish, you could smoke, you could look at the vellum-colored skies. But something was missing. It's one of the songs. It ends up with the line, "but something was missing." I mean the chorus does. The thing that was missing was any excitement or anything to do, other than spend money, have fun, have everything you wanted. So, when the hurricane came, Jimmy Gallagher sang the happy songs, one of them being, which I often think of, "For as ye make your bed, so shall ye lie." There will be nobody to cover you there and someone is going to get kicked, "For as ye make your bed, so shall ye lie." I have not listened to *Mahagonny* for almost a year now, in order to clear my memory of it. I studied it consistently from 1957, until about 19—whenever it came out. 1952, maybe, I don't know. 1952,

I guess, until 1975. I forced everybody at the Earle Hotel to listen to it. Then I moved into the Albert Hotel and forced all of them to listen to it. Then I moved into this place, and forced everybody to listen to it. But something is missing. I believe the other happy song, because I haven't listened to it for a long time, and after all it's two and a half hours long. I believe the other happy song runs along the line that "if you see a man who has money, hit him on the head and take the money away from him, you may do it. If you come to a house and there is a lady of the house in the bed, get in bed with her and fuck her until the ceiling falls down. You may do it. If there is a thought that you have not thought, for the sake of the money that you robbed, for the sake of the woman that you raped, think that thought. You may do it." For that, Jimmy Gallagher, is one of the charges brought against him at his trial, and at which he is condemned to death, although the real reason that, the final clincher after almost everything else has been forgiven, is that he did not pay for two bottles of whiskey which he had bought on credit, did not pay for a curtain rod that he had stolen when he thought that the billiard table had turned into a boat that was going to take him back to Alaska, where he'd been so happy, away from the accursed city of Mahagonny in Florida. Mahagonny, of course, being near, about twelve miles from Alzena, Florida, and about twenty miles from Pensacola. I wonder if there's anything else to cover. I've dropped all the names I could think of. As Gregory says, "Every time I drop a name it bounces." So, at this point, the destruction of *Mahagonny* has to occur. I've spent all the money. The rental cannot be paid on the Steenbeck, for example, so despite months and months and months of analyzing the soundtrack and building elaborate scripts, there is just so much garbage, at this point, because I don't...either the Steenbeck has to be given \$5,000, blah blah blah. I don't know what's gonna...I don't care what's going on, because I know that it is right, and that I would not live my life in any other way than I am. I was young and foolish when I made film *Number 12*. I thought that more elaboration of things possibly would make something that would be best. But even the scratchings on the pavement by the dog,

or something, are beautiful if they're looked at properly. No creation of God is unbeautiful. The trappings of civilization in no way compensate for the tortures they cause. The things that I'm interested in, which are: poetry, music, philosophy, graphic art, are all done better than I can do them, by the Australian Aborigines who don't even run around...who don't wear any clothes. Their philosophy at this point being considered by many experts such as T.H. Von Stronheim, to be superior to the philosophy developed by the Greeks. It is obvious to anyone who has taken the bother even to learn Polynesian which is such a simple language, you can easily learn in a few—you can learn it in an hour, and then if you spend two weeks building up your vocabulary, the most fantastic poetry in the world is opened up to you. Eskimo and Zulu are a little more difficult. Zulu, especially, but they produce poets of great grandeur.



Photo by John Palmer, 1965

Mary Hill—NYC

The following interview was conceived as a veiled explanation in alchemical terms of my film *Number 12*. But due to the lack of initiation on the part of the interviewer, Miss Hill, and the fact that I was being intensively treated by Dr. G for a nervous condition, various garblings of symbols have occurred that may be misconstrued by the reader. This is particularly true about references to murder and to copulation with various beings such as the devil, dogs, horses, et cetera.

More explicit descriptions of these events can be found in Foxcroft's edition of *The Alchemical Marriage of Frater Christian Rosenkreutz*, where superb descriptions of the various animals and the murder of the King and Queen are given. The elegant engravings in alchemical works illustrated by Theodore DeBry should also be examined, particularly *Scrutinem Chemicum* and *The Hermetic Museum*. As far as the interview itself is concerned, I would particularly direct the interested reader to the order in which various references to water and other liquids are given, and to point out that the position of the moon on the night of the dialogue made the connection between 2 9 and 1-10 plus their reverses particularly close.

—Harry Smith

MH: I know that P. Adams Sitney got you to cover your earlier life already in his interview with you, but since it was all lies anyway, I wonder if you would discuss your parents and childhood again briefly.

HS: Well, at the time when I first remember my parents I suppose I was about two years old. I had just begun to walk, although I remember seeing for the first time when I was still in the hospital right after I was born, and I saw the ceiling of the hospital and realized that there was a component of reality.

MH: This was right after birth?

HS: Sure, two or three days after, because they used to keep babies in the hospital for a longer period then. Now, my parents were very peculiar. They never really—I don't know why they married each other, except that I suppose it was the fashionable thing to do. It was the *in thing* to do to marry somebody. My parents were once described by the people who lived across the street as "fancy ladies and college toughs." I've always remembered that because both my mother and my father told me that, that the people who were living across the street referred to them as fancy ladies and college toughs. But that's about one of the earliest memories I have. Then my first footsteps were taken.

When the treaty was made with Alaska, I mean, when the United States bought Alaska, there was a special school set up by the Tsarina retained under Russian, you know, control up until the end of Russia or at least until it turned into a Communist state. It was a very bad thing my mother was....

MH: Alexandra, you mean?

HS: No, Alexandra was my grandmother. My mother was Anastasia, although it was only a claim of her later years.

Well, she was on a Russian gunboat, the *Potemkin* or something, and they were having a picnic on the boat when the news got through that even the Tsar's bodyguards had like revolted at that point, and she just barely got off the boat and worked her way back to Alaska. She didn't work her way. What I mean to say by work is that she had the money to get there, but it was like a touchy case. So that my grandmother and my mother's sister had run this school that

was like supported by the Tsarina and uh....What was the question again? Early memories? So that my mother's sister got killed in the wreck of an ambulance. She was a nurse, because all of my family were like teachers and that sort of thing. The most valued possession that my mother had was a little teapot which her sister had given her. It was the only thing she had left from her sister. It had chrysanthemums and roses worked on the outside in enamel. But I got up out of my crib and walked a few feet and went and smashed that thing, and then they came back, glued it all back together. And the second time I walked, I got up and broke it again, and they didn't bother to glue it back that time, but for a long time my mother kept the lid of the teapot.

She'd always been kind to me. When I was in my crib my mother had gotten out the *National Geographic* pictures of all the main Tibetan gods and had mounted them across the arch that went over this basket that I slept in.

Then she gradually taught me to read the newspaper (this was in about 1927 or '28 I would say, no—'26 or '27) and pick out all the words like *to*, you know, *t*, *o*. I'd go through the newspaper and find all the words *t*, *o*, and then she taught me to read the word *and*, so naturally by the time I got into kindergarten I was already reading newspapers every day. They were excellent parents that I had, but they were a peculiar type. I suppose they were fond of each other in a way. I mean, they both cried over each other, and that sort of thing, but they had two houses built, exactly the same, at opposite ends of the block, and my father lived in one and my mother lived in the other one. I had a tree house in a maple tree that was halfway down the block, see, because the garden was a block long. Actually it was like four blocks long but the other part of it was mainly planted up in things like dahlias and corn and various types of poppies, all types of plants.

MH: What do you consider your truest vocation; painting or anthropology, or what?

HS: Well, naturally, of the two I consider my truest vocation to be anthropolog. I mean, my painting is a mere adjunct to that. This is the thing I'm most interested in, linguistics and archaeology, and so forth. But they are mere amusements. My true vocation is preparation for death, for that day I'll lie on my bed and see my life go before my eyes. I've seen that twice: once when I almost drowned and once when I was in an automobile accident. I couldn't speak or anything, and this priest was like giving these last rites over me. But I'm sure the Angel of Death appears that's covered with eyes and all that sort of thing.

You see, we're living in the Middle Ages now. We're not living in an intelligent period. Despite the fact that they have all these cameras and tape recorders, we're living at kind of a low period as far as social existence is concerned.

MH: Tell me about when you lived under a bridge.

HS: Tell you about when I lived under a bridge? Well, I don't remember if it was a contract bridge or auto bridge. I've never been interested in card games, because they are like the Devil's picture book, and I don't believe in fooling with the Devil's picture book. I'll fool with the Devil. I like him. I fuck him every night, in essence, although I've become tired of him lately, because my sex life consists entirely of masturbation. But there always has to be somebody there, so I imagine the devil is in bed with me and, you know, being very nice and doing everything I tell him to do, and so forth.

MH: Say a few words about God's relation to your work.

HS: I don't believe in God in a generalized sense. What was the question? God owes me a lot of money. I mean, as I figure, He owes me about \$23,000—well, no, closer to \$90,000, you know, in my fantasies. But God is not an interesting person. God is like an old man with a grey beard that's senile. He's seen the world, from the Garden of Eden to the Crusades to Vietnam. So God is not very interesting. I'm tired of Him. I like the Devil better, because he has nicer muscles. The Devil has a shaved head and all those kinds of things, and God would never shave His head. On the other hand...

MH: The Devil's no spring chicken.

HS: Yeah, but he's managed to hold out. At least I'd rather be in bed with the Devil than with God. He's more handsome. But it's all due to God's permission, you see. The Devil could not exist without God's permission, and only exists because of God's permission. Naturally, God allows Lucifer to be beautiful and handsome and brutal and sadistic and all the things that I like. Hmm, I'm really going too far in this interview.

MH: You once told me that you have not engaged in sex for over twenty years because of the ever present danger of disease. Yet we once visited you and found you in bed with X, and although you claimed he was about to perform some curative ritual, you also made reference to his open fly.

HS: Well, I'm a very charming person, Mary. There is just scarcely anybody, at least I haven't run into anybody in the world—that if I really wanted—whether they were animal, vegetable or mineral—that if I really wanted I couldn't get them, because I'm very persuasive. I had tossed X into bed simply because of the fact that I wanted to sleep with someone. We never copulated or fornicated or whatever you want to call it. I just wanted somebody that was warm. It was a cold night and I wanted somebody that I could just put my arms around and lie there. Of course X would have done anything. He still will, but I am not interested in sex as such.

It was cold and X had promised to murder somebody, and I like to murder people. It's a lot of fun, you know, but you have to catch them when they're off guard. And I sort of got X interested in that, but at the last moment I decided he was a big blabbermouth so I shut that off. You came here when X was in bed with me? How embarrassing. It's the only time that I've been with anybody for years. I have never placed my penis inside any living creature, except a dog. Other than that it's been like knotholes or trees, and that sort of thing. My hand is the most useful thing, but the belladonna I take slows down the smooth muscle reactions, so that I don't get a satisfactory ejaculation anyway. Isn't there something about my films or my scientific research or anything? It's entirely

this sort of stuff? Why don't you shut that thing off while we smoke some hash?

MH: It's almost to the end of the tape.

HS: Okay, let's recite limericks till the end.

There once was a man from Calcutta

Who tried to write cunt on a shutter.

When he got to CU a pious Hindu

Knocked him head over bum in the gutter.

There once was a man from Bombay...

Aah, how does that go?

Who invented a cunt out of clay

But the heat of his prick reduced it to brick

And he chafed all his foreskin away.

MH: Do you think God is testing you?

HS: I don't believe so. I don't believe He has time for testing. Something is testing me, but I'm not sure it's God. I'm afraid, it's like, Mary Hill.

MH: Did you study painting?

HS: Naturally I studied painting. Do you suppose I got to be the world's greatest psychopathic painter without studying painting?

MH: Where?

HS: Well, my parents set up a special art school that a Mrs. Williams was in control of, and, you see, my family was heavily in control of the salmon industry during the World War, because they needed to get their hands on anything they could to eat. When the 1929 crash came, well, two of my uncles committed suicide immediately to get the insurance for their wives so they could keep their houses. Another one got amnesia and wandered off and was not heard from in ten years. So that, yes, my parents set up like a free art school in part of the cannery that we'd had there. It had formerly been the world's largest salmon cannery. That was my playground, the longest dock in the world. It was like a mile and a half long.

MH: I know you are a collector of several types of artifacts. The two that come to mind are the Seminole patchwork and the enormous egg collection. What is their significance and why do you collect them?

HS: Well, because they're indexes to a great variety of thoughts. The things I collect are the Seminole patchwork, which is being removed to the Smithsonian to be photographed and studied very carefully, and then the collections of eggs. There were three big collections: mine, and some Polish Count had a big collection of eggs—I forget his name. Those collections were wiped out during the Second World War, so that the only one that survived was mine. But they're like encyclopedias of design, you see. You can look in the *Oxford English Dictionary* if you want to study words, but being that the designs on the eggs are so ancient—they're like twenty or thirty thousand years old—it's like having something that's superior to a book. These things like the Seminole collection and the egg collection have been built up fundamentally to have an index of design types that I might want to use in my painting, because the real reason that I make movies or that I make paintings or that I jack off or do anything else.... It just occurred to me that Jack Kerouac's favorite sex act also was, like, masturbation. When I said "jack off" I thought about him. Because we'd often... we'd sit up all night discussing masturbation. Although I have never masturbated with him, I have never.... He wanted to, and I wanted to, but we thought that it would be defacing a religion, and so we never did it together. What was the question again? She has so many weird questions.

MH: Are you going to make a donation to the Swedish Museum?

HS: Yes, the eggs and everything I have goes to the Goteborg Ethnographic Museum. And so those things are going to end up there. I'm not particularly fond of Americans. I'd like to machine-gun them down. Like you and Andy, I wouldn't mind killing you. And it's true that I have killed a few people. But it's never been troublesome. It comes up maybe every three or four months that I'll think of somebody that I've killed and wonder what their life would have been if they'd gone on. But, uh, it's simply fun killing people, so I like to do it.

MH: When do you think the end of your life will be?

HS: Well, it will be on about October 18th of this year, or some other year, given five days one way or the other, or I may live up

until the first part of November, but I don't think so. You understand that I'm like seventy-seven years old and all that sort of thing, but I just don't have much longer to go, Mary. The fact that I live on nothing but beer and pills doesn't improve my health any, and you can quote me on that. And if anybody wants to have information on how long it takes to get beer adjusted to dexedrine, I would say about three months. I discussed that with Janis Joplin a number of times. But eventually the body metabolism pulls itself together and you're able to take several different drugs at a time.

MH: I've never had any trouble mixing beer and dexedrine.

HS: Yes, but you don't take enough.

MH: In what institutions have you studied anthropology?

HS: Not in an institution, in a university. The University of Washington in Seattle and the University of California in Berkeley.

MH: Where have you done field work?

HS: In the Northwest Coast, in Puget Sound, on Vancouver Island, among the Indians in Florida and Oklahoma. I tried to hit everything as far as the Indians were concerned, but I never got to the Southwest.

MH: How is anthropology related to your films?

HS: That would be a very difficult question to answer. I've tried to make films that were of a universal nature, that could be shown to the Zulus or the Eskimos or anyone like that, and they would still have a generalized meaning for those people that would be irreducible to anything less than what those things are. Because everybody knows what it means when an egg breaks or when tears run out of the eyes or when someone dies. They may view it in a different fashion. I mean, it's not the same, death among the Eskimos and the Zulus, but nonetheless, it is a death, and there are certain minor qualities that appear in both of them.

MH: Can you say anything more on that subject?

HS: Well, name the subject and I'll say something more on it.

MH: The relation of anthropology to your films and also this idea of making your films have a universal nature.

HS: Well, my films, except for the one I'm working on now, *Mahagonny*, which is this opera by Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht

and, uh, I hope you get that in there, that my masturbation fantasies are connected with brutality and cruelty, but nonetheless, I like Kurt Weill's music and I like Bertolt Brecht's writing. It's part of my schizophrenia. So that uh... what was the question again, my dear? How are my films connected with anthropology? Well, in the same way your interview is connected with *Film Culture*. It's like a spider looking at its own reflection on the glass. Okay, next question.

MH: How is music related to your films?

HS: Well, I'm very pleased tonight to hear the Beach Boys, because it's the first time, as I mentioned earlier, that I have heard them for many years, and they're so good. This girl, J. G., I gave her, as a present to a friend of mine who I'd had, like, uh, homosexual drives toward—Naturally I have never performed a homosexual act for, like...

MH: Money?

HS: ...thirty or forty years. I tried those things that I mentioned in the earlier portion of the interview, like horses and things. Almost anything that seemed to have an asshole or a vagina I'd try. Anthropology, of course, is connected with—well, anthropology is a recent science. It was devised by Franz Boas. He had gone to Greenland to study why sea water was green. But while he was there he became fascinated by the way that the Eskimos were always laughing in spite of the fact that they were dying at the same time. Naturally, earlier people had made classifications of artifacts from places like New Guinea and so on.

MH: The question I asked when you finally began to give more of an answer to the first question was how music was related to your films. I've seen one of your movies that has a Beatles soundtrack.

HS: Those films were all made as silent films. They were basically derived from the heartbeat and the respiration, which are, roughly, the heart beats seventy-two times a second, I mean, minute, and you expire about thirteen times a minute. You see, those are important Qabalistic numbers. Thirteen is half of twenty-six. So I had taken those two basic rhythms, the rhythm of the heart, which is about seventy-two, and the rhythm of the breathing, which is

about thirteen, and I had then interlocked them in certain ways. Those were in those handpainted films. The last one took me five years to make. I worked on it every day for five years. I, like, completely wrecked the apartment because there was so much spray paint all over the place. I also had these snakes, these California Rosy Boas that I was collecting at the time. This is all going on in Berkeley, you see. I have plenty of money, you understand. I'm a millionaire and there is no trouble getting money, but I have never touched that money because I wanted to live as much a normal life as I could. Mary, Michael, could you just play a little of this back? I want to see how it sounds.

Now, to get back to John Dewey. Naturally he was no fool. He was one of the greatest intellects that ever lived, but he didn't quite understand that people live as individuals and wars are not fought by individuals. People don't kill each other unless they're mad at each other, and so that—who were those people, a man and his wife, that wrote very good books? Charles and Mary Beard. But they were like tossed out of the situation entirely because they announced before it was publicly announced that President Roosevelt had known that Pearl Harbor was going to occur. Their careers were ruined. They were more or less the same general type as Dewey, and I suppose that Herbert Hoover was also of that type. There was a certain type of sociology that developed at one time where it was thought that America would be able to produce enough typewriters—or any fool thing—to sell to support America. Something went wrong there and it didn't work. If that system of people I mentioned, who were the Beards and Franz Boases and so forth, had worked, everything would have been hunky-dory. But it didn't work. Because people don't dislike each other—I don't think there can possibly be—well, there's enough fools left in the country to have a major war, but I don't think it's going to happen for a long time.

Andy: What does this have to do with exporting and importing?

HS: Well, because that was Herbert Hoover's major theory, and it was the thing that destroyed the Republican Party, the notion that things could be built and could be built quickly enough and sold

quickly enough and break down quickly enough—see, there are very few things that are made to last. A telephone is one. There is a natural fluctuation, because people, of course, are guilty for the way they have been acting lately.

Patrick: Well, everybody has guilt built into them.

HS: Well, they spit on me, so I'm of a higher class.

Patrick: You remind me of somebody I know in Boston: Prescott Townsend. Do you know him?

HS: Yes. We're related through the Prescott hyphen Smiths. Let's see, I used to have a medal that George Washington gave to my great-great-grandfather, but I lost it along with a lot of other things.

My great-grandfather re-founded the Templars, who were an important Masonic order. The Smiths come from New York via Galena, Illinois, but I'm not exactly sure what their background is. I used to have my great-grandfather's diaries, which he wrote in 1802 and '3 and so forth. But I lost them like everything else. I stupidly threw my possessions away. The first diary began something like, "I have decided to write down what is going to occur in my life." Then the Civil War occurred in about the fourth diary. Then Albert Pike and my great-grandfather had arguments. Albert Pike founded the Scottish Rite of the Masons, and my great-grandfather founded the Templars after the Civil War, because they were still mad at each other. I mean, everybody was split up, see, because it was a bad war. I mean, the average age of the soldier in the Civil War was around fourteen. It was like when the teenagers flipped, see, and they were just little kids that went out and fought each other and killed each other, and all that sort of thing.

MH: Are you a Qabalah expert, Harry?

HS: Hmmmm. Well, the word "qabalah" I suppose, means hidden or something like that, so I'm, of course, not. I would try as much as I could to give any kind of information to anyone. I know someone now that's making a magical sword. It's a beautiful one, too, except they broke the goddamn thing, and they should have started all over again. But it's nice. I mean it's steel with Hebrew spells written in it in silver that has been inlaid into it. But they

made a mistake. They broke the goddamn thing, and they tried to put it together with gold and everything else, but I'm afraid that they should have just junked the whole thing at that point. I'm interested in the Qabalah, of course. That's why I came to New York, to study those things. I wanted to hear Thelonious Monk play, because I'd never heard him play, and I wanted to hear about the Qabalah. And so I came to New York.

MH: Did you learn about the Qabalah?

HS: Certain things, yeah. Certain things. But I'm tired of that, because there's no real reason to do anything but trust in God. I mean, at this point I trust in God to direct my footsteps.

Mike: Harry, do you know a lot about the Eskimos? Or some?

HS: Some.

Mike: Because one thing has always interested me. It seems like jealousy is a common thing—affliction—with a lot of people, but the Eskimos share their wives with guests and they don't seem to feel this natural jealousy type thing, and that has always intrigued me.

HS: Yeah, well, that's just like some type of...

Andy: Legalized prostitution.

HS: This part of the interview is coming out much worse than the other one, where I was able to say interesting things.

MH: What about Mike's question about the Eskimos sleeping around?

HS: Well, you understand the Eskimos are like cut off. They got to North America preceding the final glaciation of the Paleolithic Age. It isn't the Paleolithic Age, it's something else, but we'll fill that in later. Leave the bathroom door open while you're in there so the mice can get out.

MH: Do you have anything more to say about the Eskimo problem?

HS: The Eskimo problem? Well, I've been invited to go on this expedition to Baffinland in February to study the Eskimos, but I won't go because I just can't take enough dexedrine with me.

Andy: Does that have something to do with string figures?

HS: Yeah. But the major problem, where the expedition is going, is that you only get like one six-pack of beer a week. I almost dropped dead when they told me this. Is that more beer spilling? As far as wife-sharing goes, it's a cultural thing. I mean, there's a lot of wife-sharing going on around here.

MH: I was going to ask you why your paintings are primitive.

HS: They're not primitive, they're the most valuable paintings in this country at this time.

MH: Well, they are primitive in the sense that they contain primitive symbology.

HS: That's because that is the symbolog. There is no symbology other than primitive symbology.

MH: Well, if that's true, then your paintings are primitive.

HS: Well, they're not as sophisticated as Picasso or Braque or Mies van der Rohe or somebody, but they're—I've tried to make those things like the introduction of one type of life into another, in the hope that they will all arrange themselves in some happy pattern, which they will never do. But fuck it, you know.

MH: Do you care to discuss *Mahagonny* at all?

HS: No, not this time. *Mahagonny* is the best thing I know of. I mean, of the people, places, or things, of the animals, vegetables, or minerals, *Mahagonny* is it, because it shows what causes things and the result of those things. So of course, I'm very interested in it. It is a beautiful work by very beautiful people. Okay, next question? I mean, stop fumbling with the question cards.

MH: Do you think you will ever finish *Mahagonny*?

HS: Yes. I think I will finish it in about September of 1972. Things are going at about that pace. I need about \$90,000 more, but I've already raised like \$15,000. I mean, just to put those twenty cans of films there and just to put that projector there has cost like \$10,000 or \$12,000 or something. So I'll be able to finish *Mahagonny*, sure. It's going to be so beautiful that no one can brush it aside. It's going to be like a miracle of motion pictures. It'll get people interested in motion pictures again and I'll have enough money to buy a studio and really make some spectacular things with, you know,

enormous sets and beautiful actresses and handsome actors, gymnasts and things.

MH: Then there's no point in dying in October.

HS: Yeah, it's all I have left. I'll finish *Mahagonny* in September, but I want to see it on the screen. I want to see what it looks like, because that is what I'm leaving behind me to amuse people for hundreds of years. I want people to be amused by it, so I have to make sure it's perfect. Next question.

MH: Do you love me?

HS: Not in the sense that I love Rosie. I'm very—well, there have been times we've been very involved with each other. But I don't think that was love. That was something else which the Indo-European language probably lacks a word for. So, of course, I'm attached to you. It was hard those first few weeks after I got you the job with Mr. Masur and you didn't phone any more. But I don't believe it was love. Any more questions?

MH: No.

HS: Okay, let's pack up and get out of here.

Biography, Filmography, Bibliography

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Biographical Information

Harry Smith's early childhood was spent in the Pacific Northwest: Portland, Oregon, and Anacortes and Bellingham, Washington. He was born Harry Everett Smith, May 29th, 1923, in Portland, Oregon. His paternal great-grandfather had been a prominent Freemason. His parents were Theosophists, who exposed him to a variety of pantheistic ideas that were to persist, through his fascination with unorthodox spirituality, a comparative approach to culture, and a desire to unify philosophies of East and West.

Smith's father, Robert James Smith, was a watchman for the Pacific American Fisheries, a salmon canning company. His mother, Mary Louise, taught school on the Lummi Indian reservation. By the age of 15, Smith had recorded many Northwest Indian songs and rituals, was compiling a dictionary of several Puget Sound dialects, and developing complicated techniques of transcription. A 1943 article in *American Magazine* featured a full page photograph of young Smith, posing with local Indian chiefs, recording the spirit dance at the Lummi Potlatch.

Smith studied anthropology at the University of Washington for five semesters between 1943 and 1944. His classes included the "Evolution of Man," "American Indigenous Linguistics," and "Chinese Art." After a weekend visit to Berkeley, during which he attended a Woody Guthrie concert, met a number of bohemians, intellectuals, and artists, and experienced marijuana for the first time, Smith realized he could no longer be content at college. In 1947, Smith relocated to Northern California, living in the Bay Area. In Berkeley, Smith lived in a small apartment adjacent to Bertrand Bronson, a noted musicologist, tending to the lawn and garden in exchange for rent. He also worked as an assistant to noted anthropologist, Paul Radin, at UC Berkeley. Shortly thereafter he moved to San Francisco, in the Fillmore District above Jimbo's Bop City; the infamous after-hours jazz club. At Jimbo's he would screen his films while jazz musicians including, among others, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, or Thelonious Monk improvised.

Smith is credited with developing ingenious methods of animation, collage techniques, and hand-painting directly onto film. Smith got involved in the avant-garde film world through the Art in the Cinema series, run by Frank Stauffacher and Richard Foster, at the San Francisco Museum of Art. In this way he came into contact with other filmmakers, including the Whitney brothers, Oskar Fischinger, and Norman McLaren. He associated extensively with the abstract filmmaker Jordan Belson, both of them consciously basing their work in the non-objective movement of Wassily Kandinsky, Rudolph Bauer, and Franz Marc.

Hilla Rebay, of the Museum of Non-Objective Painting (now the Guggenheim Museum in New York), had been sporadically supporting Smith. They corresponded for a time, and Smith sent Rebay his films, stereoscope drawings along with a stereoscope, and non-objective paintings. Rebay visited Smith at his apartment/studio, and provided him with a stipend, a plane ticket and a studio in New York to continue his studies. After receiving a Guggenheim grant, he created two optically printed films, a 3-D film, and several paintings for Rebay.

In New York, he began a serious study of the Qabalah with Lionel Ziprin. He went to work for Lionel Ziprin's greeting card company, Inkweed Arts, developing unique 3-D cards and his hand drawn image of the *Tree of Life*. During many periods in his life, Smith was involved in the OTO, Aleister Crowley's hermetic fraternity, and the occult, in varying degrees.

In the '50s Smith lived in the Bronx and on the Upper West Side of New York City. In 1952, Moe Asch's Folkways Records issued Smith's six LP *Anthology of American Folk Music* (Smithsonian Folkways 2951-3; reissued, 1997). Smith's work in collecting, preserving and disseminating American traditional music was immense, and these six discs are recognized as having had a seminal role in triggering the folk music revival of the 1950s and '60s, as Bob Dylan recently noted: "That's where the wealth of folk music was, on that particular record. For me, on hearing it, it was all these songs to learn. It was the language, the poetic language—it's all poetry, every one of those songs, without a doubt..."

Throughout the 1960s, Smith worked on his films and paintings, while living at the Chelsea Hotel. He mingled with Jean-Luc Godard, Janis

Joplin, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Arthur Young, the inventor of the helicopter. In 1964 he traveled to Anadarko, Oklahoma, recording the peyote songs of the Kiowa Indians (*The Kiowa Peyote Meeting* Folkways 4601, 1973).

Smith's broad range of interests resulted in a number of collections, including the largest known private paper airplane collection, given to the Smithsonian Institute's National Air and Space Museum. He collected Seminole patchwork textiles, Ukrainian Easter eggs and was the self-described world's leading authority on string figures, having mastered hundreds of forms from around the world and preserving them by gluing the string figures to cardboard. He compiled the only known concordance of the Enochian system. He made a study of the underlying principles of Highland Tartans, correlated it to the Enochian system, and painted elemental tablets that combined the two.

The early '70s Smith spent working on his epic film, *Mahagonny*, and the rest of the decade assembling it. The film had a ten show run in 1981 at the Anthology Film Archives in New York City.

During much of the '80s, Smith stayed with a variety of friends; a stint in Cooperstown, New York, at the home of Mary Beach and Claude Pelieu, a transient roominghouse in the Bowery, and Allen Ginsberg's apartment on the Lower East Side, where he stayed for eight months. Under the recommendation of Ginsberg's psychiatrist, Ginsberg brought Smith to Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado.

Smith lived his last years (1988–1991) as "shaman in residence" at Naropa, where his life's work culminated in a series of lectures, audio tape recordings, and continued collecting and research. In 1991, he received a Chairman's Merit Award at the Grammy Awards ceremony for his contribution to American folk music. In 1997, Smithsonian Folkways reissued his *Anthology*, which received two Grammy Awards: "Best Historical Recording" and "Best Album Notes."

Upon receiving his 1991 award, he proclaimed, "I'm glad to say my dreams came true. I saw America changed through music...and all that stuff that the rest of you are talking about."

Harry Everett Smith died at the Chelsea Hotel on November 27, 1991.

Filmography

- Film No. 1 (A Strange Dream) Music: Dizzy Gillespie's "Manteca," 1946, 2:20 mins., 35mm, color, silent
- Film No. 2 (A Message From the Sun) 1946-48, 2:15 mins., 35mm, color, silent
- Film No. 3 (Interwoven) Music: Dizzy Gillespie's "Guarachi Guaro," 1947-49, 3:20 mins, 35mm, color, silent
- Film No. 4 (Fast Track) 1947, 2:16 mins., bw
- Film No. 5 Circular Tensions: Homage To Oskar Fischinger, 1950, 2:30 mins., color
- Film No. 6 1948-51, 1.5mins., 3-D, color
- Film No. 7 (Color Study) 1952, 5:25 mins., color
- Early Abstractions (Films No. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10) Music: The Beatles, 1939-56, 23 mins., color
- Film No. 10 Mirror Animations 1957; 1962-76, 3:35 mins., color, silent
- Film No. 11 Mirror Animations 1957; 1956-62, 8 mins., color, silent
- Film No. 12 Heaven and Earth Magic Feature 1959-61, 66 mins., bw
- Film No. 14 Late Superimpositions 1964, 31 mins., color
- Film No. 16 Oz: The Tin Woodsman's Dream 1967, 14 mins., 35mm, color, silent
- Film No. 18 Mahagonny 1970-80, 141 mins., 4-screen process 16mm, color

—From *Articulated Light* Program at Harvard University, 1995

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—Jordan Belson

Harry Smith created an entirely new form of interview, every one of which is unique inasmuch as his tactic was to assess each interviewer and then proceed to pull his or her leg, like they say, creating a dance of language dedicated to fiction in the guise of truth and then ultimately to complicated and all-encompassing truths disguised as biographical fiction, tall tales, myth, and the like. Smith creates forms which demonstrate, in a variety of ways, the shunning of a quest which "question" suggests, the curse embodied in any answer, the impossibility of communication which the concept of "interview" suggests, *unless* (and here's Harry's particularity of magic)...unless one were enabled *only* to "read between the lines" of the exchange.

—Stan Brakhage

Today, it is impossible to overstate the historic worth, sociocultural impact and undiminished vitality of the music in this set [*Anthology of American Folk Music*], and Smith's idiosyncratic scholarship and instinctive wisdom.

—David Fricke, *Rolling Stone*

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Elbow/Cityful Press pob 4477 Seattle WA 98104-0477

ISBN 1-885089-06-6



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\$16.95